



Balancing Tradition and Conservation:

Gender and Security Dimensions of Wildmeat Practices in Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire's Sudano-Sahel Zones

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Executive Summary

Ballooning youth populations, climate change, and over-exploited natural resources, coupled with a growing illicit wildlife trade (IWT), contribute to unsustainable biodiversity loss in the Sudano-Sahel zones of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. The unregulated wildmeat trade, a critical component of IWT, presents a particularly urgent threat to wildlife, the environment and global public health. Moreover, as the wildlife trade in West Africa contributes greatly to serious organised crime (SOC), it creates a breeding ground for a booming illicit economy that undermines formal economic growth and development in emerging economies, which can present anchors for non-state armed groups as well. However, despite the corrosive impacts of IWT on biodiversity and the political economy of fragile states, the wildmeat trade also constitutes a critical economic lifeline for certain communities.¹ It is a unique space where certain women are highly active, sometimes holding powerbroker and influential roles, contributing to their empowerment in otherwise traditional socio-economic environments.

The Importance of Wildmeat

The consumption of wildmeat, also known as bushmeat, plays a complex role in the dietary habits and cultural practices of West African communities.² It is a significant source of animal protein, particularly in rural areas where it contributes to between 30-85% of animal protein consumed in rural areas across West Africa.³ Despite its importance, the wildmeat trade presents a paradox of being both a necessity for sustenance, and a driver of luxury consumption in urban centres. The complex balance between need and preference, availability and affordability, underscores the multifaceted nature of wildmeat consumption and the corresponding value chain aligned with it.

The importance of wildmeat in West Africa is undeniable, serving as both a staple and a symbol of cultural heritage. However, the sustainability of its consumption and trade is a pressing concern that demands attention from policymakers, conservationists, and communities alike. Collaborative efforts are essential to ensure that the benefits of wildmeat can be enjoyed by future generations, without compromising the health of the region's people and its biodiversity. Wildmeat has become closely associated with the negative impacts on human health that are linked to outbreaks of zoonotic disease and conservation issues with regards to deforestation and overhunting of protected species.⁴ Additionally, rapid biodiversity loss due to overhunting and

¹ Igugu, Olivier and Laurence Boutinot. 2023. "La consommation de la viande de brousse à l'épreuve de changements environnementaux." *Anthropology of food* 17 (May).

² Luiselli, Luca, Gnoumou Parfait, Godfrey C. Akani, Gabriel Hoinsoudé Segniagbeto, Emmanuel M. Hema, Vally Ouattara, and Edem A. Eniang. 2020. "Bushmeat Consumption in Large Urban Centres in West Africa." *Oryx* 54 (5): 731-734. doi:10.1017/S0030605318000893.

³ *This statistic is pulled from a 2005 research study. Although refrigeration, trade and commercial accessibility to other proteins has increased in recent years, the research sample still aligned with this percentage, as hunting remains popular, and rural cold storage is limited.* Williamson, Douglas, and Lonneke Bakker. 2005. "The Bushmeat Crisis in West-Africa." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/13227-0dc169eeedbbab4a04cae75af869fdccf.pdf>.

⁴ Gonedélé-Bi, B.S., J.C.K Kramoko, L. Inza Koné, L. Luiselli, and P. Gaubert. 2022. "Year-round longitudinal monitoring of a bushmeat market in central-western Côte d'Ivoire: Implication for wildlife conservation." *Journal of Nature Conservation* 70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2022.126297>.

climate change, has contributed to the growth of IWT in unregulated spaces like West Africa, as wildlife supply shrinks, despite a sustained global demand.

In recent years, traditional hunting practices have increasingly become aligned with poaching and IWT, and as such, many hunters hunt wildlife for both trades during one trip to the bush (forest or savannah, in the research contexts). As a result, in West Africa, although consuming wildmeat is relatively common in communities located in proximity to natural reserves like parks, it remains an informal livelihood trade due to limited regulations - or lack of enforcement - around the value chain.⁵ Combined with their cultural importance, these factors also contribute to wildmeat becoming a luxury item on urban menus, thereby driving an increasing demand for wildmeat outside of rural hunting communities.⁶

The Gendered Political Economy of the Wildmeat Value Chain

The commercial enterprise of wildmeat is a lucrative trade, supporting income generating activities (IGAs) and livelihoods in remote communities. Men are typically hunters and traders, while women play an important role as market sellers and restaurateurs, providing a key opportunity for their economic empowerment and access to and control over resources. Additionally, in this role, women can hold decision-making authority, a unique position in a region with stratified gender roles and norms that limit their opportunities to access power and resources. However, women's particular power position is precarious, currently existing within an informal and unregulated value chain, even in Ghana where hunting is legal.

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, it is common for women to operate in the informal economy instead of owning or being employed by formal enterprises or institutions. With high birth rates and low levels of education, many women hustle to find the most lucrative opportunities to feed their families and to empower themselves. In addition to a lack of adequate communication around laws, and limited alternative IGAs, women also represent strong links as perpetrators (offenders) in the IWT value chain because they have traditionally been comfortable working outside of the formal economy, due to the entry barriers they face in obtaining the knowledge, skills and networks they need to gain employment within the formal economy.⁷ Especially among rural communities in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, participation in the wildmeat value chain is viewed as just another IGA, like farming or shopkeeping. In certain cases, women participating in the value chain, either as intermediaries, restaurateurs, or a combination of the two, have gained comparably significant wealth, making them dynamic forces with relevant influence in their community.⁸

⁵ Uhm, Daan P. Van, and William D. Moreto. 2017. "Corruption within the Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Symbiotic and Antithetical Enterprise." *The British Journal of Criminology* 58 (4): 864-885.

⁶ Egmont Centre of FIU Excellence and Leadership. 2021. "Financial Investigations into Wildlife Crime report." ECOFEL. <https://ecofel.org/financial-investigations-into-wildlife-crime-report/>.

⁷ Seager, Joni. 2021. "Gender and Illegal Wildlife Trade: Overlooked and Underestimated." World Wildlife Foundation. https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/gender_iwt_wwf_report_v9.pdf.

⁸ Mendelson, S., Cowlshaw, G. and Rowcliffe, J.M. 2003. Anatomy of a Bushmeat Commodity Chain in Takoradi, Ghana. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 31(1): 73- 100, doi: 10.1080/030661503100016934

The Criminal Elements of the Wildmeat Value Chain

In general, the wildmeat and wildlife trade is globalised around highly organised trafficking networks. West Africa is home to many of the 'source' countries for these high-level international IWT networks, in large part due to the lack of enforced anti-trafficking regulations and the underdevelopment of the conservation sector.⁹ These criminal networks, however, do not emerge in a vacuum. As the research found, trafficking and crime are endemic to the studied communities in the research context because these populations and their livelihoods are often remote-based and underdeveloped, therefore relying heavily on informal trade, labour, unapproved cross-border activity and sometimes trade with criminal actors. Increasingly, even the global trade in regular goods has become infected by SOC, and everything from logistics, to labour, to price setting is carried out in informal ways.¹⁰

Because the informal market thrives in these unregulated sectors, not only is SOC a problem, but it is becoming increasingly easy for violent extremist organisations (VEO) - particularly VEO actors aligned with the al-Qaeda organisation Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM) - to participate without raising alarm bells. JNIM is staging its rear-bases and activities out of the forests in this border region, namely the Comoé National Park in Côte d'Ivoire, Nazinga forest in Burkina Faso, and to a lesser extent, Mole National Park in Ghana. The research found that JNIM participates in both IWT and regular value chains studied in this research at multiple levels, from simply consuming wildmeat at local restaurants to sometimes buying and selling hunting gear - specifically, ammunition, guns and gun parts - to hunters. As such, a particularly interesting dynamic that this study analyses is how women involved in IWT might interact directly or indirectly with VEOs, and how this can be a pathway for JNIM to engage with and recruit among new populations in areas in which they are not yet widely active.

Participatory Action Research Recommendations and Takeaways

The recommendations put forth by the research emphasise a need for dissemination of security and conservation policies that are sensitive to the needs and dynamics of local communities. This localised approach ensures that policies are not only effective, but also culturally appropriate and supported by those they aim to protect. Women's economic empowerment is identified as a key factor in this process, as it can lead to greater involvement in conservation efforts and decision-making processes, ultimately fostering more sustainable practices. Furthermore, the study advocates for creative and innovative strategies to regulate wildmeat hunting and sales, which is a complex issue with social, cultural and economic dimensions. The demand for wildmeat outside of rural hunting communities can drive illegal hunting practices, but wildmeat is also a source of nutrition and income for many poor and rural people. Therefore, any regulatory measures must balance conservation goals with the needs of local populations.

⁹ IWT, a trade that generates globally \$23 billion annually, has been flagged by INTERPOL as one of the most profitable trafficking sectors in the world. "Le trafic illicite d'espèces sauvages génère 23 milliards de dollars par an (expert)." 2023. APAnews. <https://fr.apanews.net/news/le-traffic-illicite-despeces-sauvages-genere-23-milliards-de-dollars-par-an-expert/>.

¹⁰ Sigsworth, Romi. 2023. "Organised crime is infecting African and global supply chains." ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/organised-crime-is-infecting-african-and-global-supply-chains>.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Bush	May include any wild area, but in our research areas, generally indicates forest or savannah
Chop Bar	Jargon for a local restaurant/spot or counter where food including wildmeat is sold
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CREMA	Community Resource Management Area
CSSF	U.K. Conflict, Stability and Security Fund
CWA	Coastal West Africa, commonly known as the “Littoral Region”, referring to countries on the West African coastline of the Gulf of Guinea
FCFA	Franc Communauté Financière Africaine, or the West African CFA Franc (currency)
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
GHS	Ghanaian cedi (currency)
GTA	Gender-transformative activity
IGA	Income-generating activity
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWT	Illicit wildlife trade
JNIM	Jama’a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin’
KII	Key informant interview, also referred to throughout the report as “respondents”
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSAG	Non-state armed group
PEA	Political economy analysis
Sahel	A geo-political zone referring to countries located between sub-Saharan Africa and the Saharan Desert, often referencing West African states in this geography
SNA	Social network analysis
SOC	Serious organised crime
UN	United Nations
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
VEO	Violent extremist organisation
VDP	Volontaires pour la défense du pays, in French, or Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland
VSLA	Village savings and loan association
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
Wildmeat	Wildlife meat hunted for human consumption, commonly referred to as ‘bushmeat’

Introduction

This research study and its recommendations were commissioned by the UK Government's Conflict Stability and Security Fund's (CSSF) Gender, Peace and Security Portfolio, in support of the development of gender-sensitive, responsive, and transformative behaviour-change campaigns.

The trade in wildmeat refers explicitly to the harvesting, sale and consumption of hunted wild animals or wild game for food, traditional medicine and other purposes.¹¹ Demand for and consumption of wildmeat is largely preferential, although in remote communities where market access is more difficult, communities often depend on hunting as a means of support for basic livelihoods and sustenance.¹² Due to its importance, but also the informal nature of its trade, wildmeat trafficking co-exists within the broader illicit supply chains that run across the forests of the Sahel,¹³ Coastal West Africa¹⁴ and Mano River states.¹⁵ The research was driven by the assumption that since the wildmeat trade and illicit wildlife trade are linked in many spaces, women play a central role in facilitating both networks. Based on this assumption, the research avoids relying on only traditional women-centred approaches to address wildmeat trafficking, which often puts the burden of responsibility for change on women. Instead, we identify context-specific, locally-driven solutions to address unsustainable practices linked to this trade. These solutions are intended to work with both men and women to transform harmful gender norms and retain or improve women's socioeconomic status while promoting conservation.

Research Objective: To strengthen the collective knowledge base and awareness of the impacts of wildmeat trade on biodiversity loss in the Sudano-Sahel Forest ecoregions in southwest Burkina Faso, northeast Côte d'Ivoire and northwest Ghana, map out the role of women in this economic ecosystem, and identify approaches that retain or improve their economic livelihoods while promoting conservation.

Women have a prominent role in the wildmeat value chain in West Africa, but there are knowledge gaps about their direct role in IWT, limiting the success of efforts to combat wildmeat trafficking due to the potential of gendered impacts. These women's vulnerabilities are of even more concern today, given the growing expansion of VEOs from the Sahel into Coastal West Africa. The illicit supply chain, which also provides critical resources to these local communities, is where VEOs

¹¹ Akinwande, Babatope. 2012. "Quel rapport avec le genre ? La consommation de viande de brousse dans le bassin du Congo - CIFOR Forests News." Forests News. <https://forestsnews.cifor.org/12131/quel-rapport-avec-le-genre-la-consommation-de-viande-de-brousse-dans-le-bassin-du-congo?fnl=en>.

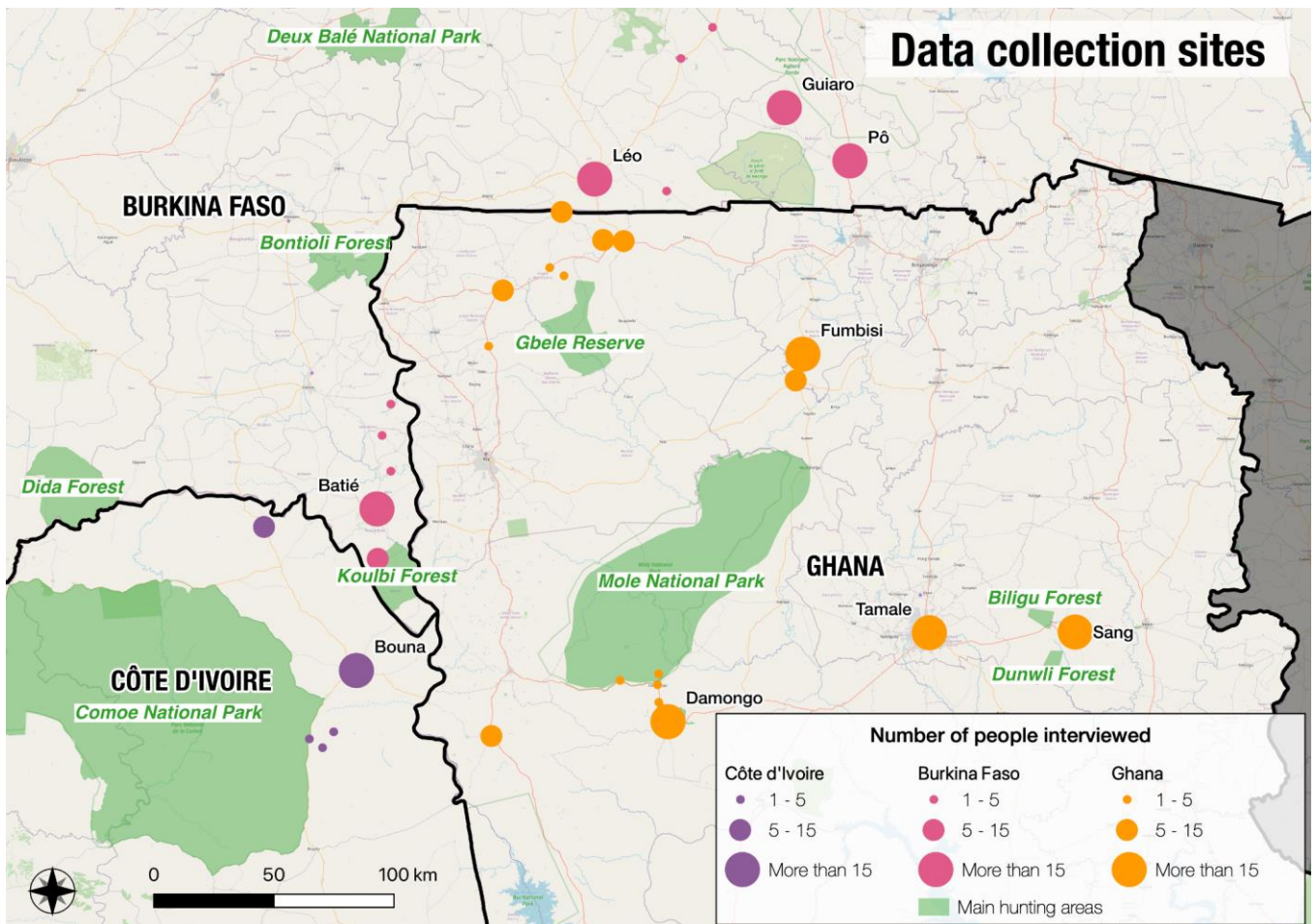
¹² *This finding was universal across all key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the three research contexts of this study.*

¹³ *The Sahel is the biogeographic region that is a transition zone between the Sudanian savannahs to the south and the drier Sahara Desert to the north. It stretches across the southernmost latitudes of North Africa and includes 14 countries situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea.*

¹⁴ *Coastal West Africa is a political sub-region that is situated between the Sahel to the north and the Gulf of Guinea to the south and generally includes Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.*

¹⁵ *The Mano River Region is another economic and political sub-region of West Africa that includes Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The Region takes its name from the Mano River which originates in the Guinean Highlands and forms part of the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone.*

and SOC groups make direct contact with these populations. Therefore, a gendered assessment of the nexus between the wildmeat value chain and VEOs and SOCs could help equip policymakers with the knowledge and capacity to identify tactical interventions to mitigate these threats before they are fully realised.



Research Methodology

This study was designed and conducted by a team of Elva staff, consultants and enumerators. The research team conducted participatory action research (PAR)¹⁶ into the intersectionality of IWT, with a focus on wildmeat, in the Sudano-Sahel Forest ranges in the border areas between north-western Ghana, north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire and southern Burkina Faso. In Part One, the study first looks at the cultural and legal environment in which hunting, wildmeat trade and consumption occur, through the collation of an analysis of this context from the primary (field data collection and expert interviews) and secondary (literature review) research. Part Two then focuses on a gendered social network analysis (SNA) of actors involved in the wildmeat trade. Part Three provides a review of the criminal elements of IWT. Given the paucity of gender-disaggregated data on the wildmeat trade, this report focuses on the roles of men and women, while other gender considerations are beyond its scope.

¹⁶ PAR is an approach to action research emphasising participation and action by members of communities affected by that research. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and following reflection. The Tamale, Ghana training therefore was a critical component of this study.

On 13 February 2023, Elva's field team led a pilot training activity with 32 women involved in wildmeat sales, with the aim of building a corps of civil society expert influencers in Tamale, Ghana. The women who participated were identified during field research and were selected as a representative diverse sample (varying ages, backgrounds, languages, religions, and education) among women involved in the wildmeat value chain from the Upper East, Upper West, Northern and Savannah regions of Ghana. The goal of this workshop was to identify a group of influencers to help inform this report's recommendations, and who may then act as facilitators for future gender-transformative interventions to tackle environmental crime and biodiversity loss while mitigating the negative impacts to the fragile economies on which vulnerable groups depend.

Primary Research, carried out through data collection, was led by enumerators and field-based consultants conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIs) - often referred to in the text as respondents - using semi-structured guides. A total of 201 KIs (115 in Ghana, 68 in Burkina Faso and 18 in Côte d'Ivoire) and 22 FGDs (13 in Ghana, 7 in Burkina Faso and 2 in Côte d'Ivoire) were conducted from May to August 2023. In Burkina Faso, data collection was carried out in the Centre-Sud (Pô and Guiaro), Centre-Ouest (Léo and Biéha) and Sud-Ouest (Batié) regions. In Côte d'Ivoire, data collection took place in six locations in the north-eastern Bounkani region (Doropo and Bouna). In Ghana, data was collected in the Upper West region (Tumu and Gwolu), in the Upper East (Fumbisi), in the Savannah Region (Larabanga and Damongo) and in the Northern Region's capital, Tamale. The research is also informed by 55 expert interviews with practitioners, policymakers, and researchers based in the U.S., Europe and across Africa and the research contexts.

Respondent demographics: 48% of the KI participants were female and 52% were male. In Ghana, the sample skewed more female (57%). In Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, it was more difficult to identify women KIs to participate in the research due to the illegality of the trade in both countries, thus limiting the female sample to 35%. Respondents aged 30-49 made up 59% of the sample, while youth (18-29) represented 13%, highlighting how most participants in the value chain are aged 30 and over.

This research faced several important limitations. The geographic scope is limited to the border regions between Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, and therefore the findings are only conclusive to activities linked to the wildmeat trade in these specific locations and among these particular communities. Additionally, the research did not employ a statistically significant sampling strategy, relying instead on FGDs, KIs and expert interviews. Therefore, conclusions are qualitative in nature and comparative statistics cannot be generated. Additional limitations were predominantly encountered in Côte d'Ivoire, where the sensitive nature of the questions around the illicit activity led to some self-censorship, resulting in overall fewer women respondents in Côte d'Ivoire. Growing insecurity from violent extremism in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire also produced a limited research sample in both countries, due to the non-permissibility of accessing actors in remote areas where armed groups control territory and/or presented security risks to the research team and respondents.

Part One: Cultural and Legal Aspects of the Wildmeat Value Chain

In West Africa, wildmeat is deeply integrated in local and traditional cuisine and often involves wide social networks that are highly family-oriented.¹⁷ The illegal nature of this trade stems from two issues. First, as the unsustainability of the commercial trade in consumable (wildmeat) and non-consumable animals poses a major threat to wildlife populations and the environment, international and national restrictions may be imposed that limit the trade without taking local needs and challenges into account.¹⁸ Second, for a variety of reasons that are discussed below, the trade is largely carried out informally, and most actors involved do not have the proper certification or licence to carry guns or hunt and sell wildlife products.

This pervasive informality is a cause for concern. For example, due to inadequate enforcement of food sanitation standards around wildmeat hunting, sales and consumption, the trade continues to spark fear over the spread of infectious diseases driven by zoonotic pathogen spillovers, such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak.¹⁹ Overall, in West Africa, limited or unclear regulations and their lack of enforcement hamper most efforts to manage the trade,²⁰ even though all three countries are signatories to international treaties that regulate hunting and wildmeat consumption and protect wildlife and biodiversity, including the 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which encourages member states to establish anti-IWT laws.²¹

In terms of the legality of wildmeat hunting in the three research contexts, Ghana has the most formally permissible environment for hunting and consumption. Yet, in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso where hunting and firearms bans are in place, the wildmeat trade continues largely uninterrupted. Hunting in these countries therefore often takes place in communities on the periphery, where demand for wildmeat overpowers limited regulations and law enforcement capacity. However, some universal rules apply to all three countries - even though, in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, they are customary instead of statutory - including the adoption of hunting seasons and quotas and restrictions on certain protected areas and animals.²²

¹⁷ Expert interview with Kassa Barthéléme, PHD Senior, Conservancy and wildlife management, Benin, January 2014

¹⁸ Fa, J.E. 2005. "The illegal commercial bushmeat trade in Central and West Africa." *United Nations Chronicle* 42 (2): 28-33. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/illegal-commercial-bushmeat-trade-central-and-west-africa>.

¹⁹ Kurpiers, LA, B. Schulte-Herbrüggen, I. Ejotré, and DM Reeder. 2015. "Bushmeat and Emerging Infectious Diseases: Lessons from Africa." *Problematic Wildlife*, 507-51. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-22246-2_24.

²⁰ *All KIIs and FGDs in Côte d'Ivoire, and a majority of the respondents in Burkina Faso, spoke of how hunting is still a common activity, despite laws prohibiting the activity in certain areas.*

²¹ *In addition to national enforcement, INTERPOL, UNODC, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime, and Wildlife Enforcement Networks are all active law enforcement entities in Africa focused on curbing wildlife crime.* Egmont Centre of FIU Excellence and Leadership 2021. See annex 1 of this report for key legal frameworks related to wildmeat for the three countries covered in this study.

²² *In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, despite a hunting ban, informal rules have sprung up within the illicit hunting industry - see section 1.2 for more details.*

Box 1: Defining Terms related to the Illicit Wildlife Trade

Wildlife crimes contribute to thriving, lucrative and transnational illicit trafficking networks that are linked to global SOC syndicates, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).²³ But not all trade in wildlife is illegal, and it generally only becomes a crisis when it is qualified as unsustainable to the survival of a particular species.²⁴

IWT is defined as the movement of wildlife from the site of 'capture or kill' through various logistical stages until it arrives at markets and is sold.²⁵ Poaching is the illegal hunting and capturing of wildlife, and is a component of IWT.²⁶ However, poaching also implies trespassing on land. It is distinct from 'animal theft', and is therefore distinguished legally from cattle rustling, or cattle theft, which is a common crime in West Africa, and one that is directly known to finance violent extremist activity linked to JNIM.²⁷

Poaching in West Africa is carried out by both SOC actors as well as local hunters (for subsistence and consumption or sale) who trespass onto private property, oftentimes not realising they are doing so, to hunt.²⁸ Additionally, local factors can enable poaching, such as communities not agreeing to or understanding conservation or agro-pastoral and land ownership policies. Therefore, when hunters continue to hunt in areas where the activity is banned, it can be legally codified as poaching.²⁹ Poaching also includes big game hunting in rare species, such as elephant or pangolin, as trophies or for bespoke buyers, especially those involved in SOC, contributing to significant biodiversity loss and the decline of certain endangered species.³⁰

The hunting season in the border regions occurs between December and August, although dates may fluctuate depending on seasonal rainfall and shifting trends in animal gestation. Off-season hunting is prohibited by both national laws and customary rules intended to protect animals during their gestation period. Despite these rules, the lack of overall conservation enforcement has led

²³ Expert interviews with Gender and IWT experts at the World Wildlife Fund, 14 December 2023

²⁴ "What is Poaching? The Illegal Wildlife Trade Explained." n.d. World Wildlife Fund.
<https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/illegal-wildlife-trade>.

²⁵ Seager, 2021; pg. 42

²⁶ O'Regan, Katarina, Pervaze Sheikh, Tomas Husted, Alexis Arieff, Lauren Ploch Blanchard, and Nicolas Cook. 2021. "Wildlife Poaching and Trafficking in Africa: An Overview." CRS Reports.
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11923>.

²⁷ Nsaibia, Hèni. 2023. "Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)." ACLED.
<https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/JNIM-Non-state-armed-groups-and-illicit-economiesin-wWest-Africa-GI-TOC-ACLED-October-2023.pdf>.

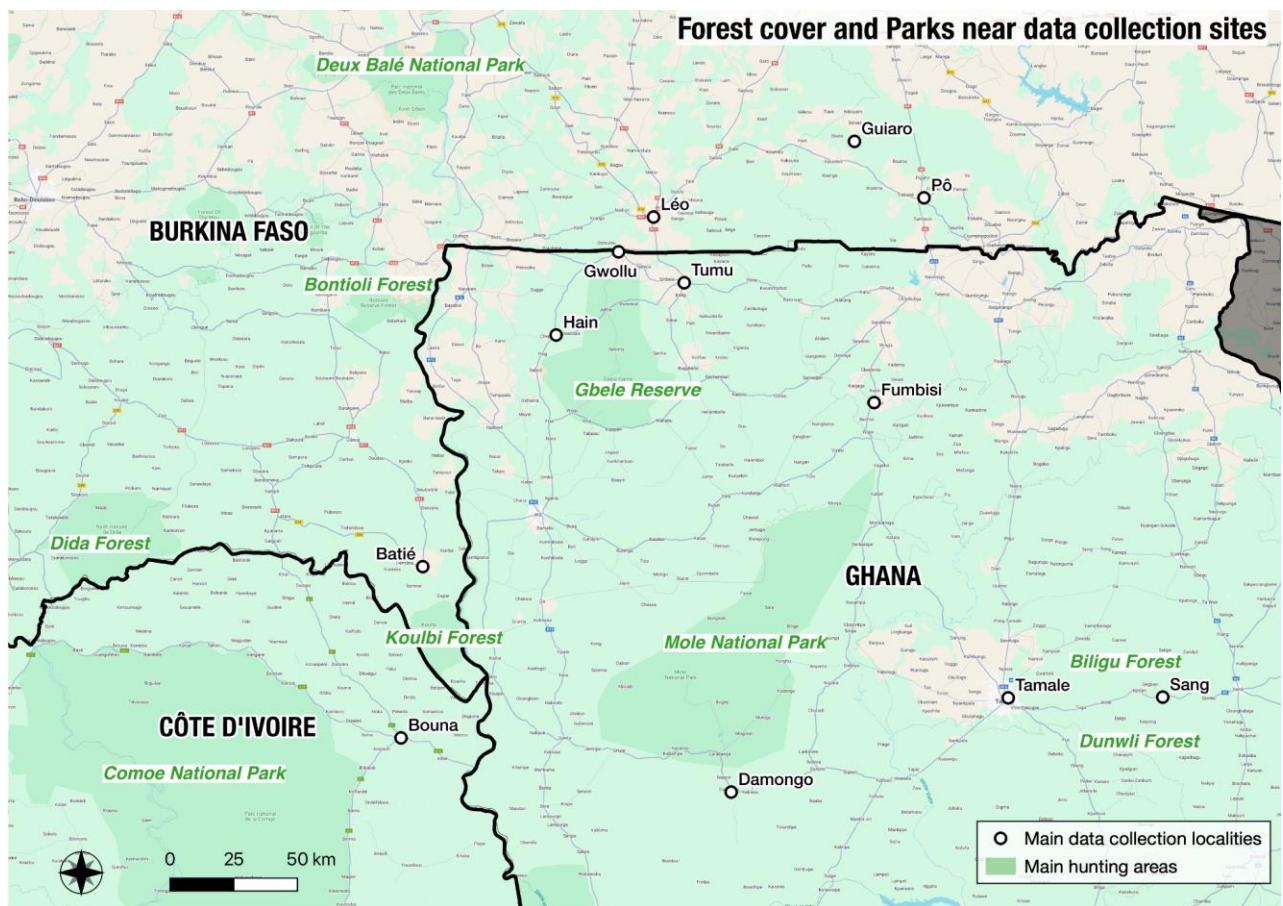
²⁸ O'Regan et al. 2021

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

to a decline in certain species in recent years,³¹ shrinking the supply of wildmeat and reducing local vendors' profits despite soaring costs for hunting and cooking supplies.³²

Communities hunt for various reasons, including sustenance, customary rituals and as an income-generating activity (IGA). In rural areas where communities rely more on available natural capital for IGAs, hunting can be a way to supplement diets and achieve a minimum level of food security. In some locations, certain ethnic groups customarily engage in hunting more than others, likely due to their proximity to forests helping facilitate access to wildlife. Engaging in the wildmeat value chain is often a complementary or seasonal activity to farming in the research contexts, and many hunters participate in agriculture during the hunting off-season.



Because hunting can be an integral part of local communities' way of life, outlawing wildmeat trade and hunting can create divisions within peripheral communities. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, a woman said that when she was caught selling meat obtained from illegal hunting, she was publicly shamed and denounced in front of her community.³³ In cultures where collective perception and respect are essential elements of social capital, especially for

³¹ Hema, Emmanuel M., Valy Ouattara, Gnoumou Parfait, Massimiliano Di Vittorio, Djidama Sirama, Daniele Dendi, Wendengoudi Guenda, Fabio Petrozzi, and Luca Luiselli. 2019. "Bushmeat Consumption in the West African Sahel of Burkina Faso, and the Decline of Some Consumed Species." *Oryx* 53 (1): 145-50.

³² *In all three research contexts, respondents explained that the wildmeat trade used to be a lucrative activity, but that it is now an increasingly less profitable sector.*

³³ KII with female broker, Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire

women, and there are already reputational risks for husbands and fathers who let their wives or daughters work outside the home, this type of blowback could have unintended consequences on women's economic empowerment. This Ivorian woman concluded, "The state should lift the ban and regulate all of this so that we are less subject to various blackmail and other moral or even physical violence."

Overall, the complex relationships between suppliers, buyers and rule enforcers in the wildmeat value chain, which will be further examined in Part Two, underscore the complexities of the sector; the IWT cannot simply be prevented through legislative action such as hunting bans.³⁴ Therefore, while government policies banning hunting may be understandable from the perspective of preserving biodiversity or to protect vulnerable rural communities from violent extremism, if these policies are implemented without alternative, culturally acceptable livelihoods in place for both men and women, they could cause more harm than good.³⁵

1.1 Ghana's Legal and Thriving Wildmeat Trade

Hunting in Ghana is legal, and a series of laws regulate it, with the goal of maintaining sustainability and conservation standards.³⁶ Hunters reported that as long as they obtain an updated licence for firearms, ammunition and hunting, they are operating within the parameters of the law.³⁷ There are no designated big game hunting zones, and only small animals are authorised for local hunting.³⁸ Conservation and hunting are primarily governed by the Wildlife Conservation Regulations of 1971 (LI 685),³⁹ of which over half of the research sample in Ghana are aware.⁴⁰ In fact, certain respondents in Ghana are aware of the negative impacts of not respecting conservation policies, with a Fumbisi focus group describing unregulated wildmeat hunting as corrosive to the environment and negatively impacting community access to and availability of natural resources.⁴¹

Ghanaian conservation policies are deployed through the establishment of a hunting season (from August and December) and quotas and creating protections around certain spaces and wildlife,⁴² such as the 2012 Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources' official Forest and Wildlife Policy sets

³⁴ Expert interview with A. ROCHA conservation NGO, Mole National Park, 16 February 2024

³⁵ See section 3 for further discussion.

³⁶ Expert interview with senior management of Ghana's Forestry Commission, Mole National Park, 16 February 2024

³⁷ UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. n.d. "Ghana's Arms and Ammunition Decree, 1972." UNREC. <https://www.unrec.org/docs/harm/Ghana/ACTS/Arms%20and%20ammunition%20act%201972.pdf>.

³⁸ Chardonnet, Bertrand, P. Flack, Barnay Dickson, Jon Hutton, William M. Adams, and Holly Dublin. 2008. "Big game hunting in West Africa." IUCN Portal. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/2009-074-En.pdf>.

³⁹ The Wildlife Resources Management Bill (2014) consolidated all conservation laws in Ghana. https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/325/Wild%20life%20Resource%20Mangt_%20Bill,%202014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁴⁰ *Respondents in the suburbs of Tamale and Gwollu (on Ghana's northern border with Burkina Faso) reported that they were unaware of hunting regulations and laws.*

⁴¹ FGD Pintengsa, Fumbisi, May 2023, with people involved in the bushmeat trade.

⁴² West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WA BiCC). n.d. "Issues Brief: Ghana Combatting Wildlife Trafficking." USAID. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WJN6.pdf.

standards for biodiversity protections.⁴³ Ghana's Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission is responsible for upholding and enforcing these regulations through forest rangers and their engagement with the Community Resource Management Areas (CREMA).⁴⁴ However, resource and staffing shortages have limited the government's enforcement capacity, so much of the conservation work is done by conservation- and biodiversity-focused NGOs.⁴⁵ One key challenge within the Wildlife Division is that it is not decentralised enough to efficiently manage protected areas.⁴⁶ For example, the Wildlife Division only issues hunting licences inside the national parks, and there are only three offices in the north. Given the number of hunters in the area, this is inadequate. As a result, many hunters continue to operate without the right documentation and authorization.⁴⁷

Box 2: Ghana's Localization of Resource Management and Conservation

Ghana passed the Wildlife Conservation Regulation n°685 in 2000, establishing protected spaces around several forests. However, the policy disrupted traditional land access and ownership, and some communities were forcibly removed from these newly protected spaces. Funded by the Climate Investment Fund, the Ghana Forest Investment Program established CREMAs in 2010⁴⁸ in an attempt to mobilise local support for conservation policies from communities near protected areas who rely on hunting and forest resources for their livelihood.⁴⁹ The goal of CREMAs was to promote the communities' participation in conservation work and create feedback loops between the community and government about which policies work and which do not. This way, the Wildlife Division could inform and partner with the community on best resource management practices to avoid over-hunting and reduce destructive agro-pastoral practices. In return, the communities have direct access to national authorities through the Wildlife Division and can leverage government resources to identify alternative IGAs when hunting and farming are disrupted by the establishment of protected spaces.

Structurally, CREMAs are linked to the Director of Community Engagement at the Wildlife Division. The community itself is represented by a Community Resource Management Committee, which includes customary authorities, women, youth and relevant community stakeholders. These committees are tasked with ensuring the protection and sustainable use of resources of a designated area of nearby forest. This might include establishing conservation rules at the local level that limit hunting and farming in protected zones.

⁴³ Republic of Ghana, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources. 2012. "Ghana Forest and Wildlife Policy." UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) database. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/gha144198.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Chardonnet et al. 2008

⁴⁵ Expert interview with A. ROCHA conservation NGO, Mole National Park, 16 February 2024

⁴⁶ Expert interview with Manager of Mole National Park, January 2024

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ghana Forest Investment Program, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources. n.d. "Community Resources Management Area (CREMA)." The Ghana Forest Investment Programme. <https://mlnrgfip.com/crema/>.

⁴⁹ Dzekoto, Godwin Evenyo, and Daryl Bosu. 2018. "Community resource management areas (CREMAs) in Ghana: a promising framework for community-based conservation." *World Heritage for Sustainable Development in Africa*, 37-43. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368236>.

While, in principle, these structures are positive in promoting community participation and decentralising conservation efforts to the local level, the structures are not entirely effective, suffering from lack of resourcing and capacity. However, there are a few exceptions in Ghana where CREMAs have had a positive impact on local development and conservation, although this is largely due to the participation of enthusiastic leaders and members. Another issue faced by these committees is that in most cases, women's participation is either non-existent or only tokenistic, leaving women members without any real voice or influence over the group's activities. These groups are also voluntarily staffed, and the government does not provide any resources for staffing members (and paying salaries), which disincentivizes participation.

In many traditional hunting communities, village chiefs and other customary leaders are also important actors involved in enforcing conservation policies,⁵⁰ including enforcing traditional hunting rules that are not enshrined in law. For example, many hunting groups in northwest Ghana reported that they avoid hunting on Fridays or during holidays, and foreigners or hunters from other regions are expected to share some of their hunt with the local chief.⁵¹ Another informal conservation measure is the prohibition of hunting pregnant animals. Local authorities also enforce prohibitions on bush burning during hunts to avoid brush fires that could destroy community members' crops or property.⁵²

Ghana also has a series of regulations and laws that aim to monitor wildmeat sales at the chop bars that are popular throughout the country.⁵³ The Ministry of Health's Food and Drug Authority⁵⁴ governs food safety and sanitation standards for food establishments⁵⁵ and provides guidelines for handling raw meat and meat products.⁵⁶ Like the Wildlife Division, the Ministry of Health's veterinary officers are faced with resource and personnel constraints when conducting district-level safety checks on wildmeat and enforcing basic sanitation and hygiene protocols on food sellers, resulting in inconsistent and infrequent coverage.⁵⁷

1.2 Côte d'Ivoire's Discreet and Corrupt Wildlife Trade

Hunting in Côte d'Ivoire has been banned since 1974⁵⁸ and, according to the law, the hunting, possession, trade and consumption of wildmeat is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.⁵⁹ However, illegal wildmeat hunting and consumption is still widely practised in rural areas and in

⁵⁰ Expert interview with Olivier Igugu, Resource Management Specialist, Centre d'Expertise en Gestion Minière (CEGEMI), Université Catholique de Bukavu, 27 September 2023

⁵¹ Focus Group in Damongo, Ghana, June 2023.

⁵² Focus Group in Taha, Tamale, Ghana, June 2023

⁵³ Focus Group in Sorbelle, Ghana, July 2023

⁵⁴ "Public Health Act, 2012 (Act No. 851 of 2012)." 2020. Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC136559/>.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ "Catalogue of Ghana Standards 2018." n.d. Ghana Standards Authority (GSA). <https://www.gsa.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-Catalogue-of-Ghana-Standards.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Expert interview with a Civil Society Conservation Expert in Northern Ghana

⁵⁸ Ministerial order n° 003/SEPN/CAB of 20 February 1974; Gonedelé Bi et al. 2016.

⁵⁹ Expert interview with Ivorian Water and Forestry Agent, January 2024

communities located near the country's largest protected reserve, Comoé National Park.⁶⁰ In the early 2000s, wildmeat hunting in Côte d'Ivoire was estimated to generate 74,000 tonnes of meat annually, although this number has likely fallen in recent years due to overhunting.⁶¹ Yet, officials noted that recent estimates suggest that wildmeat remains a multi-billion CFA industry (GBP millions), and that, among underdeveloped and underemployed communities in the north, the sector employs approximately 45,000 people.⁶² Although government officials report their widespread knowledge of these illicit hunting trends,⁶³ on an official level, the country is still party to a series of legal frameworks. These include adopting the CITES agreement in 1993⁶⁴ and establishing a National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity in 2003,⁶⁵ which help guide its policies on wildlife conservation, gun rights and food production.⁶⁶

These policies include several laws intended to regulate hunting of specific species, including for customary use, despite the official hunting ban, which all respondents acknowledged during data collection.⁶⁷ Additionally, the National Commission on the Fight Against Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons polices the proliferation of guns, including among hunters. Finally, like Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire has a series of health and sanitation protocols aiming to guide restaurants' and the service industry's sale of raw and cooked meat. However, since hunting is illegal, the research found that selling wildmeat is generally conducted in more discreet ways, with those involved often bypassing these health protocols entirely.⁶⁸ In restaurants, wildmeat is usually sold as a 'secret menu' item, and sellers usually only sell to trusted buyers who order in advance.

Law enforcement - typically forest rangers, but also border security and police - are unable to effectively enforce Côte d'Ivoire's hunting ban due to staffing and resource constraints. Furthermore, there are high levels of corruption among security operators, who turn a blind eye to hunters carrying out their trade in return for a bribe.⁶⁹ Respondents described systemic corruption among public officials that includes racketeering and extortion around issuing forged government access passes to parks and hunting and gun licences, as well as the setting of

⁶⁰ Key informant interviews, Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire and Dindé, A.O, A.J. Mobio, A.G. Konan, and et al. 2017. "Response to the Ebola-related bushmeat consumption ban in rural Côte d'Ivoire." *Agriculture & Food Security* 6 (28). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-017-0105-9>.

⁶¹ Chardonnet et al. 2008

⁶² Expert interview with Ivorian Water and Forestry Agent, January 2024

⁶³ Expert interview with Ivorian Water and Forestry Agent, January 2024

⁶⁴ UN Habitat. 2021. "Environmental and Social Impact Assessment of Côte d'Ivoire." Legal and Regulatory Framework. https://www3.dfc.gov/Environment/EIA/ciprel/Chapter_2_Legal_Framework.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. 2016. "Constitutional requirements for environmental protection in Côte d'Ivoire - Draft." DBSA. <https://www.dbsa.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2021-05/Chapter%207b%20Cote%20d%27Ivoire%20English.pdf>.

⁶⁶ *The country's wildlife and biodiversity protections were adopted in 1964, under Law No. 65-255.* "Building on Legality to Deliver Responsible and Deforestation-free Commodity Supply Chains - HCV-HCS Legal Review for Côte d'Ivoire." 2018. Proforest. https://www.proforest.net/fileadmin/uploads/proforest/Documents/Publications/p04b_hcvguidance_ci_march13.pdf.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Multiple Kills with hunters and brokers in Bouna and Doropa, Côte d'Ivoire

⁶⁹ *All Kills with hunters in Côte d'Ivoire confirmed that a well-established and organised process exists whereby hunters pay bribes to security forces in return for access to the parks.*

arbitrary hunting quotas.⁷⁰ According to Ivorian respondents, these corrupt procedures are well established, and hunters generally adhere to them, even though they are aware that fees are pocketed by law enforcement. As a result, hunters rely on personal relationships with individual forestry agents with whom they negotiate these arrangements. Even then, hunters reported that these hand-shake deals are not guaranteed, and they remain at risk of being interdicted by other security operators that they are not directly paying off,⁷¹ which can result in violence, arrests and heavy fees.⁷² As a hunter from Bouna explained, “The forest rangers provide us with paperwork allowing us to hunt, and warn us to be discreet and not to be caught [by other law enforcement]. We pay for this paperwork and tell them exactly what animal we want to hunt. The paper authorises only a fixed time period for one hunt. There is no fixed price though, and the amount changes according to the goodwill of the rangers.”

Côte d'Ivoire has made some effort to clamp down on unregulated hunting, such as by recently deploying water and forestry agents to carry out awareness missions to better educate the local population about the importance of protecting biodiversity.⁷³ Furthermore, the government actively cracked down on hunting during the COVID-19 pandemic due to fears of the transmissible implications of the disease from unregulated human movement and the potential zoonotic risks. These hunting crackdowns occurred concurrently with the government's response to the onset of violent extremism, following the JNIM attack on the Kafolo joint gendarmerie-military base in June 2020.⁷⁴ Because VEOs often stage out of parks and ungoverned spaces, the Ivorian government-maintained enforcement of park entry bans (see Part Three for more details).⁷⁵ However, respondents reported that hunting now appears to have returned to pre-pandemic activity levels.

Interestingly, the research found that despite the criminalization of hunting, local communities have traditionally viewed hunting groups and the wildmeat value chain in a positive light, participating in a long-lasting traditional activity. However, times are changing, and hunters and female brokers often face stigmas for participating in an illegal activity, leading them to operate with discretion and exclusively within the informal market. The presence of VEOs in the parks has increased the perception that groups of armed men travelling discreetly in the bush⁷⁶ are bad actors, painting hunters as potentially aligned with these VEOs.⁷⁷ As such, according to respondents, hunters generally operate individually to avoid any potential negative association with SOC and VEOs.

⁷⁰ Multiple Kills in Doropo and Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire and Expert interview with Ivorian conservationist, January 2024

⁷¹ Multiple Kills in Doropo and Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire.

⁷² Focus group in Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire

⁷³ Expert interview with Ivorian Water and Forestry Agent, January 2024

⁷⁴ Bernard, Aneliese. 2022. Tactical Research and Analysis of Counter Terrorism and Extremism in Côte d'Ivoire, UK Government's Conflict Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) MEL West Africa. N.p.: First Call Partners and Tetra Tech.

⁷⁵ Expert interview with Ivorian Water and Forestry Agent, January 2024

⁷⁶ “Bush” may include any wild area, but in our research areas, generally indicates forest or savannah.

⁷⁷ Multiple Kills and FGDs in Côte d'Ivoire.

1.3 Burkina Faso's Remnants of Organized Hunting

Hunting in Burkina Faso has historically been an activity with cultural significance as well as being an important contributor to IGAs and a source of tourism for the country. Big game hunting brought international tourism to the country, leading the government to privatise wildlife tourism in 1985 through hunting reforms that modified and established dozens of protected areas and reserves.⁷⁸ The Burkinabe government then decentralised management of hunting tourism through the establishment of local public-private enterprises called Village Wildlife Management Committees, which also generated local revenue.⁷⁹ Throughout the 1990s, these village committees organised and regulated access to wildlife reserves and parks, restricting tourism safaris and big game hunting to certain parks like the Comoé-Léraba reserve (Cascades region), Nazinga Ranch and Sissili reserve (Centre-Ouest region). Meanwhile, small game and village (or wildmeat) hunting continued in more isolated settings reserved for the local population.⁸⁰ In 2008, Burkina Faso established the National Office for Protected Areas (Office National des Aires Protégées, in French, OFINAP) within the Department of the Environment, responsible for implementing and overseeing biodiversity conservation policies.⁸¹

During this time, hunting in Burkina Faso was regulated by a series of conservation and gun ownership laws and a 1997 environmental code,⁸² including Law n° 024-2007/AN protecting cultural heritage and biodiversity,⁸³ which established environmental management and protection principles. Like in the other contexts, customary rules also govern communal hunting practices, such hunting bans on specific days for customary/religious reasons and holidays (see section 1.5 on Taboos and Mysticism).⁸⁴

Hunting regulations are largely enforced by Burkinabe security forces, including the military, police and forest rangers.⁸⁵ However, due to the onset of violent extremism, the government lost nearly half its territory to VEOs, making enforcement of these regulations challenging as security providers' priority was combating violent extremism.⁸⁶ As VEOs based their operations out of Burkina Faso's parks, it became difficult for security forces to distinguish VEOs from hunters (see section 3.4 on VEO exchanges with hunters).⁸⁷ As a result, hunting was made illegal during the

⁷⁸ Poppe, Julie. 2012. "Conservation's Ambiguities: Rangers on the Periphery of the W Park, Burkina Faso." *Conservation & Society* 10 (4): 330-343. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26393088>.

⁷⁹ Chardonnet et al. 2008

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Kambiré, Hermann W., Ida Nadia S. Djenontin, Augustin Kaboré, Houria Djoudi, Michael P. Balinga, Mathurin Zida, Samuel Assembe-Mvondo, and Maria Assembe-Mvondo. 2016. "Forest governance in Burkina Faso: The Context of REDD+ and adaptation to climate change in Burkina Faso." Center for International Forestry Research. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep16264.8.pdf>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Loi n° 024-2007/AN portant protection du patrimoine culturel au Burkina Faso. FAOLEX." 2018. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC078671/>.

⁸⁴ Focus Group, Pô, Burkina Faso, August 2023

⁸⁵ Expert interview with Burkinabe security official, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

⁸⁶ Expert interview with Dr. Sirima, Université de Fada n'Gourma, September 2023

⁸⁷ "Containing Militancy in West Africa's Park W." 2023. Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso-niger-benin/310-containing-militancy-west-africas-park-w>.

early days of VEO incursions in 2013,⁸⁸ and the government stopped issuing hunting licences. With ongoing enforcement limitations, communal militias like the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) - a vigilante force that was established by the government to augment security operations - sometimes assume the roles of security forces in policing the population and enforcing hunting bans and arms controls.⁸⁹

Respondents reported that although hunting bans are well known, they are largely ignored due to a lack of enforcement. Although there is a general consensus that hunting restrictions negatively impact their profits, many of this study's respondents involved in the value chain expressed an understanding of the importance of conservation policies and how they are intended to protect certain species, particularly given the once-thriving big game tourism.⁹⁰ In further acknowledgment of the need for conservation rules, respondents complained that IWT has disrupted the regular wildmeat value chain, leading to price gouging and shrinking profits for hunters and intermediaries/brokers.⁹¹ Rampant insecurity driven by armed groups, including VEOs, bandits and even the VDP, has further reduced wildmeat profits and discourages hunters from travelling into parks and forests, forcing them to instead hunt wildmeat in the bush near their homes where both animals and profits are smaller.⁹²

1.4 Communicable and Zoonotic Diseases

Seventy-five percent of emerging infectious diseases in humans are linked to zoonotic transmission,⁹³ with recent studies highlighting the link between biodiversity loss and zoonotic communicable diseases. Deforestation, alongside urbanisation, is one of the leading causes of transmission, driven by disrupted food structure networks and changes in host-pathogen interactions.⁹⁴ As a result of biodiversity loss and shrinking green spaces, different species are forced into more condensed habitats, interacting despite not normally having come into contact with each other.⁹⁵ This interaction is where fluids are exchanged between species, which can manifest into new zoonotic outbreaks.⁹⁶

In recent years, there have been heightened concerns about the health implications of handling and consuming wildmeat, which has led to the deployment of new legal frameworks and a growing interest by governments and non-state actors to regulate and monitor the trade.⁹⁷ Medical and virology experts agree that there is a clear correlation between the uncontrolled spread of

⁸⁸ "Arrêté N° 2013 - 191 /MEDD/CAB/ portant ouverture et organisation de la saison d'exploitation de la faune 2013-2014 au Burkina Faso." 2013. Le Ministre de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable. https://rsis.ramsar.org/RISapp/files/3121621/documents/BF1879_lit161215_1.pdf.

⁸⁹ Multiple KIs in Sud Ouest, Burkina Faso and expert interview with Forest Agent, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

⁹⁰ Expert Interview with NGO conservationist, Parakou, Benin, November 2023

⁹¹ Key informant interview with an ethnic-Nouni female broker from Léo, Burkina Faso.

⁹² Multiple KIs and FGDs in Centre-Ouest, Burkina Faso

⁹³ Kurpiers et al. 2015

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Expert interview with government official involved in conservation policy, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, January 2024

zoonotic pathogens and unregulated handling of wildmeat, particularly in underdeveloped and overpopulated locations.⁹⁸ Due to a lack of regulation or enforcement of sanitation and food safety protocols, combined with limited cold chain infrastructure and the secrecy with which much wildmeat must be traded, wildmeat can quickly become contaminated.⁹⁹

While any raw meat can present health risks, in West Africa, sanitation standards in venues that sell food and procedures for handling raw meat from point of kill to sale are generally weakly enforced. Furthermore, most wildmeat in West Africa is smoked, dried or salted (usually in peripheral villages, by women, before they resell the meat), procedures that are considered insufficient for rendering meat non-infectious.¹⁰⁰ However, the consumption of infected wildmeat is not the only means by which communicable diseases can spread. For example, Ebola, SARS and HIV first infected humans during the hunting, butchering and processing of infected animals, when the disease jumped from animal bodily fluids to humans.¹⁰¹ Although hunters risk exposure when interacting with wild animals in the bush or carrying their kill, the highest risk occurs during the butchering process.¹⁰² This is why wildlife markets are prime locations for hosting the spread of zoonotic disease, particularly if sanitation and food safety standards are not maintained.¹⁰³

Following the 2014 Ebola outbreak, wildmeat sales and consumption were highlighted as new risk behaviours, decreasing across West Africa in both poorer and wealthier households.¹⁰⁴ However, public health education and mitigation protocols in the region are limited. Among the research respondents, a general lack of awareness around communicable diseases linked to wildmeat was most prevalent among Ivorians, and none reported engaging with health inspectors.¹⁰⁵ However, because it is illegal to sell wildmeat in Côte d'Ivoire, there are no formal processes by which officials can regulate related health and sanitation standards and practices. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, respondents reported that there is no enforcement of food safety or sanitation standards around wildmeat, when prompted about regulations, although some respondents were aware of the zoonotic disease implications of handling raw meat improperly.

As hunting remains legal in Ghana, veterinarians, health administrators and sanitation officers sometimes regulate the quality of meat that hunters sell to chop bars to ensure that safety protocols are upheld. Chop bars and restaurants are often required to show proof of food safety

⁹⁸ Hilderink, M. H., and I. I. de Winter. 2021. "No need to beat around the bushmeat-The role of wildlife trade and conservation initiatives in the emergence of zoonotic diseases." *Heliyon* 7, no. 7 (July). 10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07692.

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ "Bushmeat Importation Policies | CDC." n.d. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/importation/bushmeat.html>.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*.

¹⁰² LeBreton, M., AT Posser, U. Tamoufe, W. Sateren, E. Mpoudi-Ngole, JLD Dikko, and DS Burke. 2006. "Patterns of bushmeat hunting and perceptions of disease risk among central African communities." *Animal Conservation* 9:357-63. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-1795.2006.00030.x.

¹⁰³ Greenfield, Patrick. 2020. "Ban wildlife markets to avert pandemics, says UN biodiversity chief." *The Guardian*, April 6, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/ban-live-animal-markets-pandemics-un-biodiversity-chief-age-of-extinction>.

¹⁰⁴ Onyekuru, NA, CO Ume, CP Ezea, and NN Chukwuma Uma. 2020. "Effects of Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak on Bush Meat Enterprise and Environmental Health Risk Behavior Among Households in South-East Nigeria." *J Prim Prev.* 41, no. 6 (December): 603-618. DOI: 10.1007/s10935-020-00619-8.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*.

and sanitation certifications, if they pass health standard inspections in Ghana; however the certifications are not regularly renewed by health inspectors, despite this being required by law, and oftentimes this process is fraught with corruption, as these certificates can be 'bought' from inspectors, without a safety check actually being conducted.¹⁰⁶ However, many respondents noted that in recent years, these regulators have been noticeably less present, and they do not inspect the activities of hunters, butchers or intermediaries - those who face the biggest risks of zoonotic disease transmission.¹⁰⁷

1.5 Alternative uses for Wildmeat

Wildlife can be used for multiple reasons; different parts of one animal may be consumed or used for medicinal, cultural and ornamental (e.g. skins for clothing and furniture) purposes.¹⁰⁸ For example, lions and elephants are eaten as wildmeat but also sold to bespoke buyers for their teeth, skins, horns and ivory.¹⁰⁹

Ghana and Burkina Faso boast thriving unregulated trade in wildmeat for medical purposes, often referred to as 'black medicine'. Forty-three species of wildlife are traded for medical and therapeutic purposes in Ghana alone, often by female vendors in major urban centres.¹¹⁰ These medicinal uses of wildlife are relatively common in different parts of West Africa and are rooted in customary beliefs. Some examples of wildlife's therapeutic uses include: frogs used to treat wounds; wild dove eggs consumed to help with fertility; antelope blood prescribed for respiratory issues; snake venom or electric eels distilled with alcohol to cure heart conditions; or lion fat mixed with burnt roots, reduced into a topical cream to aid with digestion.¹¹¹

Additionally, some communities use wildlife in their spiritual incantations or ceremonies. In these cases, animal parts are believed to have protective powers, not just therapeutic. For example, chameleons help prevent early infant death, straw-coloured fruit bats protect children, and, when rubbed on children's limbs, topical solvents made of oxidised warthog bones and hippopotamus fat combat spiritual possession.¹¹²

Taboos and Mysticism Affiliated with Wildmeat

Cultural and religious taboos and mysticism also heavily influence the wildmeat trade in West Africa. The Muslim practice of halal creates a religious taboo around the consumption of monkeys and wild pigs, while other customary or animist taboos might focus on avoiding hunting animals that have spiritual or mystical significance in a community. Indeed, customary authorities have

¹⁰⁶ Multiple focus groups with female shop owners in Ghana

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Uhm, Daan P. Van, and William D. Moreto. 2017. "Corruption within the Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Symbiotic and Antithetical Enterprise." *The British Journal of Criminology* 58 (4): 864-885.

¹⁰⁹ Expert Interview with NGO conservationist, Parakou, Benin, November 2023

¹¹⁰ Gbogbo, Francis, and Joseph Kobina Daniels. 2019. "Trade in Wildlife for Traditional Medicine in Ghana: Therapeutic Values, Zoonoses Considerations, and Implications for Biodiversity Conservation." *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 24 (3): 296-300.

¹¹¹ Expert Interview with NGO conservationist, Parakou, Benin, November 2023

¹¹² Gbogbo and Daniels 2019

employed such religious justification to promote conservation of certain endangered species.¹¹³ Additionally, individuals or families may be assigned an ‘animal totem’, such as the lion, hyena, elephant, dove, pigeon, or crocodile, which carries significant symbolic meaning and prohibits hunting or consumption of these animals.¹¹⁴ Taboos are not static, with new taboos emerging and old evolving. For example, the outbreak of Ebola reduced market demand for certain wildlife in the Mano River states, creating a new taboo in response to fears that handling and consuming these animals would lead to more outbreaks.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, the expanding agro-pastoral trade in West Africa has increased consumption in crop-foraging wildlife, a vicious cycle related to reduction in wildlife habitat and increased human-animal contact.¹¹⁶

Additionally, hunters apply mystical meaning to the type of animals they observe on the hunt. For example, in Pô, Burkina Faso, hunters believe that encountering turtles is a sign of good luck, while seeing a hedgehog indicates that the hunter will need to run, likely to chase a fast animal.¹¹⁷ Such strong and specific beliefs demonstrate the culturally integrated nature of hunting, highlighting the challenges in applying statutory law in a largely customary context.

In all three research locations, when hunting is community-based, hunters rely on their traditional and religious leaders’ guidance - and often communications with the gods for approval - before venturing into the forest. Traditional hunters reported the necessity of gaining permission from community leaders before a hunt, underscoring the adherence to communal social norms.¹¹⁸ A hunters’ focus group from outside Tamale described the process: “If we leave for hunting on a Saturday, we inform the chief on Friday and he relays the message to the imams, who organise a Qur’anic recitation on Saturday morning before we leave. After the Quranic recitation, the gong-gong beater makes the announcement that it is time, and the hunters travel together in an organised bus. When we get to where the hunting is supposed to take place, we first go to the community chief with cola [nut] and some money and make our intentions known.”¹¹⁹

Animist hunters revere the bush as a world where all animals have spirits.¹²⁰ Entering this world and taking an animal’s life requires alignment with the aforementioned norms and practices to show respect.¹²¹ If not respected, hunters in Burkina Faso believe that these spirits can haunt the

¹¹³ Expert Interview with NGO conservationist, Parakou, Benin, November 2023

¹¹⁴ *It’s rare that a family will be assigned a totem that is of an animal that is also commonly hunted for wildmeat, such as the Common Duiker. Nonetheless, there are rituals that can be performed to allow for the hunt of one’s totem, when necessary. For example, the elephant is the totem of ethnic-Gourmantché in northern Burkina Faso, but they believe that they can sacrifice their child to hunt the elephant.* Expert Interview with NGO conservationist, Parakou, Benin, November 2023

¹¹⁵ Hays, Brooks. 2020. “Bushmeat trade pattern changes hint at erosion of cultural taboos in West Africa.” UPI, September 18, 2020. https://www.upi.com/Science_News/2020/09/18/Bushmeat-trade-changes-hint-at-erosion-of-cultural-taboos-in-West-Africa/4391600430721/.

¹¹⁶ *Farmers are increasingly encroaching into wildlife habitats, which leads wildlife to forage in newly established fields. Farmers then defend their crops while increasing their protein consumption by hunting the offending animals.* Hays 2020.

¹¹⁷ Focus group with hunters in Pô, Burkina Faso, August 2023

¹¹⁸ Focus group with hunters in Batie, Burkina Faso

¹¹⁹ Focus group discussions with hunters in Sang, Taha and Vitting, Tamale, Ghana.

¹²⁰ Expert interview with Kassa Barthélém, PHD Senior, Conservancy and wildlife management, Benin, January 204

¹²¹ Expert interview with Ghanaian hunting chief, Tamale, Ghana, September 2023

community or intervene with daily life. For example, traditional folklore posits that spirits living as animals can disguise themselves into human form, resulting in stories such as the hunter who married an antelope (a traditional fable from Fada n’Gourma, in the Est Region, Burkina Faso).¹²²

In Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire, hunters are venerated for their ability to provide the necessary wildlife-based ingredients for traditional medicine and talismans/fetishes, for which they must undergo a special initiation.¹²³ Hunters are also recipients of animist talismans that promote a successful hunt, contributing to their local mystique as ‘sorcerers’.¹²⁴ These mystical traditions are believed to give hunters influence over the local population, such that they are seen as experts on wildlife and are the primary source of wildmeat for consumption and fetish rituals.¹²⁵ As explained by a female shop owner in Tumu, Ghana, “Hunters are respected and feared. It is believed that they have some power that helps them in the bush.”¹²⁶

In Ghana, animist beliefs related to hunting are focused mostly on avoiding hunting on specific days, in certain locations, or killing particular animals. For example, some ethnic groups forbid hunting on specific days because they believe that that is when their gods enter the forest.¹²⁷ The Kassena will not hunt the crocodile or monkey because they believe that these animals helped save their ancestors in war.¹²⁸ If one does hunt or trade in mythically forbidden animals, the animist gods can kill the person or bring bad luck or generational misfortune to a family.

There are also specific gendered taboos that impact hunting norms and traditions in all three countries. Hunters in Burkina Faso are advised not to sleep with their wives before the hunt if they are menstruating, as women’s menstrual cycles reportedly damage the mystical protection that the hunter needs to be successful.¹²⁹ Among the Gourma ethnic group in the central Sahel, sexual relations are prohibited several days before the hunt in general, and while their husbands are out in the bush on a hunting trip, wives must remain in the house, acting as if they are widows. Additionally, only women who have gone through menopause may safely cook elephant meat.¹³⁰

Certain gender norms also work to exclude women from being hunters, such as the belief that women are incapable of conferring with the gods. In all three research contexts, because of this belief, a female hunter might put her family or herself at risk because she cannot independently verify which days are appropriate for hunting or which animals must be avoided because they are actually gods themselves.¹³¹ Entrenched cultural folkloric rituals and beliefs help illustrate why simply criminalising hunting cannot be effective without community-led, grassroots action to find acceptable alternatives that also align with religious beliefs, cultural norms and expression.

¹²² Expert interview chief of a Burkinabé hunting brotherhood, Tanguiéta, Benin, December 2023

¹²³ Expert interview with traditional Lobi authority in Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire

¹²⁴ Focus group in Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Key informant interview with ethnic Sissala, female shop owner from Kusengang, Tumu, Ghana.

¹²⁷ Expert interview with Ghanaian hunting chief, Tamale, Ghana, September 2023

¹²⁸ KII with Kassena hunter, Gwollu, Ghana, June 2023

¹²⁹ Expert interview with Ghanaian hunting chief, Tamale, Ghana, September 2023

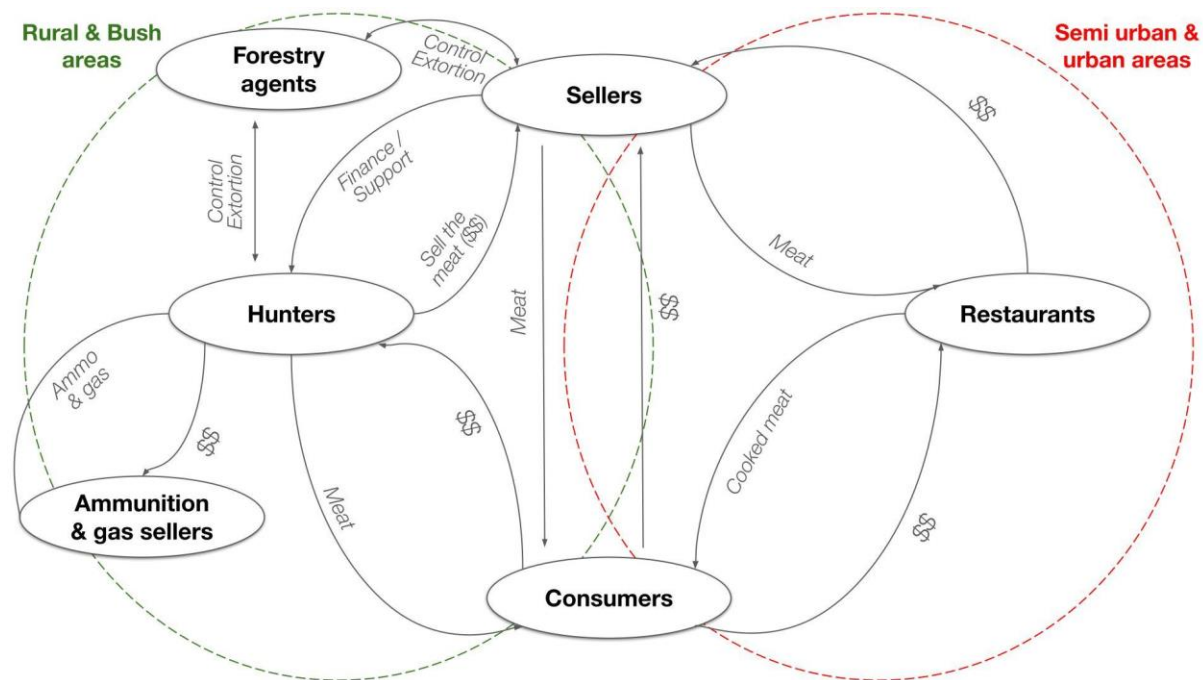
¹³⁰ Expert interview with chief of a Burkinabé hunting brotherhood, Tanguiéta, Benin, December 2023

¹³¹ KII with women broker in Batie, Burkina Faso, July 2023

Part Two: A Gendered Social Network Analysis of the Wildmeat Trade

This section includes a gendered assessment of the roles of various actors involved in the wildmeat value chain, broken down between 'offenders' and 'defenders' of wildlife - those who perpetrate wildlife-related crimes as opposed to those who defend against them.

Social Network Analysis Diagram of Wildmeat Value Chain Actors¹³²



Across all three contexts, women engaged in the wildmeat value chain are most likely to participate as wildlife 'offenders', often working with meat that has been illegally procured, despite not necessarily believing or understanding that they are doing anything wrong. This lack of knowledge is largely due to insufficient communication regarding the nature of regulations, and the research finds that female intermediaries do not verify with hunters if meat was obtained legally. However, given strong entrenched gender norms across the three contexts, it is also unlikely that women feel comfortable questioning male hunters, nor are they likely in adequately stable financial positions to reject meat that they suspect may have been obtained illegally. Men, on the other hand, participate both as wildlife offenders and defenders. As offenders, men are primarily hunters. While buying and reselling meat is typically viewed as a woman's role, men are more likely to be involved in international trafficking syndicates.¹³³ Men also occupy the primary defender roles as park rangers and other law enforcement, public servants, and experts that are responsible for or have influence over the wildlife trade.¹³⁴

¹³² The SNA was developed based on the field data collection and expert interviews

¹³³ Seager 2021

¹³⁴ Agu and Gore 2020

Box 3: Demographics of Wildmeat in the Research Contexts

In the surveyed areas in Ghana, the Dagomba¹³⁵ and Sissala tribes have historically and culturally dominated the hunting sector in the Northern and Upper West regions of Ghana. The data from Ghana shows that wildmeat hunters, sellers and restaurant owners are often from the same ethnicity, highlighting how the social network links within the wildmeat value chain are forged through familial or tribal connections. However, the research also found that consumption of wildmeat is universal, not ascribed to a certain ethnic group or community.

While culturally significant due the long and rich history of Ivorian hunting societies, in Côte d'Ivoire, large rodents (agouti or grasscutter) are generally viewed as a food commodity preferred by poor and remote hunting communities, whereas rarer and larger species are typically considered to be luxury items.¹³⁶ The groups involved in the wildmeat value chain in the research locations are localised to the Bounkani prefecture in the Zanzan Department in northeast Côte d'Ivoire. This research captured the wildmeat habits of the Birifor, Dagara and Lobi ethnic groups, and, to a lesser extent, the Koulangou peoples. In Bouna - a prominent trade centre located east of Comoé national park near the borders with Ghana and Burkina Faso - the Lobi comprise the predominant hunting caste and therefore control the wildmeat trade.

Finally, across southern Burkina Faso, specific ethnic groups dominate the wildmeat trade because of their tracking skills, such as the ethnic-Gourounsi in Leo or the ethnic-Nunas of the same area and across northern Ghana. Most hunters in Burkina Faso also participate in other activities on a seasonal basis. In Leo, Guiaro and Batié, these activities include crop farming, whereas in Bieha, hunters are also reportedly involved in pastoralism.

2.1 Hunters

In all three contexts, the typical profile of a hunter is a physically active male with strong cultural and ancestral ties to the trade, often hailing from many generations of hunters. However, these men are also often undereducated, and underemployed. The three primary reasons driving a man's choice to participate in hunting include personal preference, tradition or to augment their existing incomes while also remaining engaged in alternative employment opportunities. As one woman explained, "some people are hunters right from birth. It's an occupation passed on from their grandparents to them. But some do it because there are no jobs."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ *The Dagombas are a majority ethnic group of the larger Mole-Dagbani ethnic groups that emerged within the kingdom of Dagbon in modern day Northern, Upper West, Upper East and Savannah Regions of Ghana, extending into southwest Burkina Faso, northeast Côte d'Ivoire and northwest Togo, at its height. The historical kingdoms that predate colonial borders extended well beyond Ghana's borders into neighbouring countries, highlighting the cross-border fluidity of these trade communities, despite linguistic and territorial barriers.*

¹³⁶ Bachmann, Mona Estrella, Martin Reinhardt Nielsen, Heather Cohen, Dagmar Haase, Joseph A. K. Kouassi, Roger Mundry, and Hjalmar S. Kuehl. 2020. "Saving rodents, losing primates—Why we need tailored bushmeat management strategies." *People and Nature* 2:889-902. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10119>.

¹³⁷ KII with ethnic-Gonja female cook, Damongo, Ghana.

In West Africa, big game hunting often requires the use of firearms, whereas small game, such as the popular grasscutter or agouti, may be caught using traps. However, in the research contexts, whether it is big game or small, the position of hunter is almost exclusively held by men.¹³⁸ When women do participate in ‘hunting’, these activities appear to be limited to the capture and killing of small game that they encounter around their household or fields.¹³⁹ In addition to the aforementioned gendered animist beliefs that prevent women from being hunters, it is also culturally inappropriate for women to journey into the forest or savannah on a hunting trip either alone or with men that are not their immediate family members. In addition to its cultural implications, this type of trip into the bush would elevate women’s reputational risks or risks of gender-based violence (GBV).¹⁴⁰ However, due to the increased presence of VEOs in the research locations’ parks, new risks of violence are also pushing men to be less inclined to travel to these unstable areas.¹⁴¹

The Shifting Perceptions of Hunters and Challenges of Evolving Security

In the research locations, hunters have traditionally garnered respect due to their position as armed community protectors and providers of wildlife products. Additionally, in their protector role, hunters are expected to drive away rogue wildlife that have encroached into the village, land or property, risking community safety. They may also contribute to protecting their villages from bandits, VEOs and criminals, operating as proxy communal or self-defence militias, as one respondent in south-central Burkina Faso explained how hunters helped neutralise a nest of violent extremists hiding out in the Kampala Forest. Respondents in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire also reported that hunters are typically feared by armed groups they encounter due to their proficiency with weapons, although JNIM has been known to deliberately avoid clashing with hunters in favour of recruiting them instead.¹⁴² However, the risk of violence increases when different armed groups, operate in the same space. For example, in Mali, when hunters organised into communal militias to counter VEOs, this led to an increased volume of violent interactions.¹⁴³

Although hunters and those involved in the wildmeat trade have been traditionally viewed as influential members of society, the political economy of hunting is shifting. In all three research contexts, there was a growing perception that hunters’ livelihoods are negatively impacted by conservation efforts. The research does not explicitly corroborate this perception. Instead, it suggests that when conservation measures are established, the rationale behind them is often

¹³⁸ Expert interview, Deputy Forestry Commissioner of Mole National Park, Ghana, 15 February 2024

¹³⁹ Expert interview with Dr. Joni Seager, Bentley University, 28 September 2023

¹⁴⁰ Seager 2021

¹⁴¹ Multiple KIs with male hunters in Ghana and Burkina Faso

¹⁴² Promediation. 2020. “North of the countries of the Gulf of Guinea - The new frontier for jihadist groups?” Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

<https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/13432629/North+of+the+countries+of+the+Gulf+of+Guinea+-+The+new+frontier+for+jihadist+groups.pdf/97cbceda-85c1-33fc-45fd-50f8ddaaa0ab?version=1.2&t=1625138447487>.

¹⁴³ Beevor, Eleanor, and Adnan A. Walid. 2022. “JNIM in Burkina Faso: A strategic criminal actor.” Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Burkina-Faso-JNIM-29-Aug-web.pdf>.

not adequately communicated to the wildlife-dependent populations, resulting in misunderstandings about the intentions of these policies.¹⁴⁴

Many respondents spoke about how hunters in Ghana are increasingly underemployed, barely making profits, due to park closures and shrinking biodiversity. Hunters are also underemployed in Burkina Faso, but the population seemed more understanding of this dynamic as violent extremism has disrupted most people's livelihoods, and the government has employed many hunters into the VDP.¹⁴⁵ The dwindling game stock combined with the rising cost of hunting has significantly reduced the economic power of hunters, a dynamic which had, in the past, added to the prestige and reverence they typically enjoyed in their communities. This has resulted in the perception that hunters are lazy or involved in crime, as one shop owner in Damongo, Ghana explained "In the past, hunters were much revered. But lately, because they don't get enough meat as before, people see them as jobless and lazy."¹⁴⁶ Moreover, respondents from all three contexts reported that, due to the prestige traditionally associated with hunting, hunters may be reluctant to engage in alternative IGAs - perceiving other types of work to be beneath them.

Due to stereotypes of 'hardened manhood' and violence that are associated with hunters, traditional masculine gender norms have also contributed to the presumption of criminality linked to hunting.¹⁴⁷ Respondents in Damongo said that "Hunting is not for someone who is gentle. Most people who hunt were notorious and hard in their 'boyish' days. They enter the bush at their own will, with spiritual fortification, and they are emboldened to do anything. As a result, people have this perception that they are criminals."¹⁴⁸ Similarly, a focus group of hunters in Gwollu, Ghana, explained that "The community is beginning to label hunters as criminals because we have guns, so any robbery or attack that involves weapons is easily linked to hunters without any evidence. Even the police harass us, especially us younger hunters."

Hunting Trips

As noted, due to restrictions levied on hunting in protected areas and because of the growing insecurity in border spaces near the Sahel, hunters' activities have decreased. This is because many are concerned for their safety and do not want to risk the penalties for being caught hunting in protected areas; others do not have the time or resources to travel farther distances to where, in the face of shrinking biodiversity, animals may be more abundant. As a result, in all three research locations, many hunters indicated that they typically now carry out shorter hunting trips and travel shorter distances, which impacts the quality and quantity of their kill. However, some exceptions apply, and due to the high prices and restrictions levied on hunting in Côte d'Ivoire, Ivorian hunters from Bouna reported that they will sometimes travel to Mole National Park or Gbele Reserve in Ghana, or the Deux Bale or Dida Forests in Burkina Faso to hunt.

¹⁴⁴ Expert interview with A. ROCHA conservation NGO, Mole National Park, 16 February 2024

¹⁴⁵ Expert interview with Burkinabe security official, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

¹⁴⁶ Key informant interview with ethnic-Gonja, female shop owner in Damongo, Ghana.

¹⁴⁷ Focus group with hunters in Damongo, Ghana, August 2023

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

When longer-distance hunting does occur, it is typically conducted in groups. Hunting groups, often composed of two to three men, are generally organised along familial or clan lines, and sometimes among friends from across different ethnic and religious backgrounds. However, in certain regions such as Fumbisi, Ghana, (north of Mole National Park), hunters reported preferences for hunting alone, with respondents noting that a solo operation avoids the challenges of having to divide up the meat for profits. Where hunters are also farmers, during the dry season when their fields are fallow, they typically operate in groups, taking the time to go out on longer hunting trips as their agricultural responsibilities are minimal or non-existent. However, during the wet season, these hunters may only hunt individually on an ad hoc basis, as their priority is to work on their farms.

Box 4: Hunting Brotherhoods

Sometimes hunters belong to organised brotherhoods like the Dozo, a traditional hunting brotherhood prevalent in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali.¹⁴⁹ The Dozo (also known as Donzos) hunters are well known and respected locally for their hunting and security activities, particularly in remote places where the state is absent.¹⁵⁰ The Dozos can also be the agents of social cohesion within traditional West African social structures, representing their community to external actors and mediating intercommunal disputes. Their role extends beyond hunting, and they are often integrated into communities as guardians of tradition, culture and security. For example, these brotherhoods are seen as important conveyors of oral traditions in their societies, contributing to the retention of traditional values. Additionally, Dozos sometimes participate in community initiatives such as environmental, health, or local security programs, and their involvement can help mobilise the community. In Burkina Faso, when the Dozo joined the VDP to combat VEOs, this helped to mobilise more community involvement in counterterrorism.¹⁵¹

However, the Dozo also have a complicated relationship with the state, sometimes playing polarising roles with regards to political elites. In Côte d'Ivoire, following the civil wars, there have been discussions around demobilising and depoliticizing the Dozo. However, as these hunting groups possess an outsized role as respectable figureheads in certain communities, the Ivorian government will certainly face several challenges if they choose to move forward.¹⁵² Although these brotherhoods hold significant cultural cache, in general, communal militias pose particular risks due to their lack of accountability to the rule of law and the state. As such, while these are important groups to leverage for peacebuilding and other initiatives, caution should be employed when utilising their armed capacity to augment conventional security.

¹⁴⁹ Other hunting groups also exist, like the Niansogoni among the ethnic-Mossi in Burkina Faso, the Pouli among the ethnic-Senoufou in Sikasso (Mali) and Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire), and the Tengabisié among the ethnic-Gourounsi in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso. Expert Interview with NGO conservationist, Parakou, Benin, November 2023

¹⁵⁰ Moody, Jessica. 2020. "Addressing the Dozo in Côte d'Ivoire." The Resolve Network. <https://www.resolve.net.org/research/addressing-dozo-Côte-divoire>.

¹⁵¹ Expert interview with senior security officer, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

¹⁵² Focus group in Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire, August 2023

The Economics of Hunting

Hunters of wildmeat are generally involved in ‘low frequency’ selling, which indicates that they are not wholesale providers of all types of wildmeat, nor do they carry or stock large quantities or varied types of meat.¹⁵³ To facilitate transport and maximise income, hunters typically butcher bigger animals in the bush, cutting them up into smaller pieces they can physically carry. Each piece of a larger animal, or whole smaller animals, are then typically sold to female intermediaries and wholesale buyers - often also family or friends - who sell the meat to restaurants and chop bars.

In Ghana, hunters typically set the price of wildmeat, which is determined by the price of fuel, ammunition and potential consumer sales prices. Given their direct connections to consumers, female intermediaries and restaurant owners may also be involved in setting these prices (see part 2.2 on brokers and intermediaries). In Côte d'Ivoire, however, due to the additional costs of unregulated fees and potential fines associated with wildmeat, it is sold at an inflated price compared to the market price for the same meat in neighbouring Ghana and Burkina Faso (see Table 1).¹⁵⁴ Because of these high prices, Ivorian buyers, particularly women shop owners, rely on trust-based credit systems where hunters are paid in full after the wildmeat is sold to consumers.¹⁵⁵

Table 1: Hunting Expenses and Profits¹⁵⁶

	Hunting Expenses*	Hunting Profits*
Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hunting expenses** (day): 100 - 200 GHS (£6.5) ➤ Hunting expenses (multi-day): over 500 GHS (£33) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Single trip: 400 - 1,000 GHS (£26 - 65), depending on kill and capture. ➤ Raw wildmeat: 50 - 100 GHS (£3 - 6) per part ➤ Small animals (sold whole): 50 - 300 GHS (£3 - 20), e.g. grasscutter is sold for 150 GHS (£10). ➤ Rare animals: over 350 GHS (£23) per small animal or part of a larger animal.
Côte d'Ivoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hunting fees (day): 20,000 - 30,000 FCFA (£26 - 40), paid to forest rangers for access. ➤ Hunting expenses: 40,000 FCFA (£52) Hunting ban violation fine: 400,000-700,000 FCFA (£522 - 913) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Warthog leg: 25,000 FCFA (£33) ➤ Antelope: 12,500 - 35,000 FCFA (£16 - 45), depending on the cut and size
Burkina Faso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Multi-day hunting trip: 25,000 - 30,000 FCFA (£33 - 40) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Roan antelope leg (~100 kg): 75,000 FCFA (£98) ➤ Baboon: 20,000 FCFA (£26) ➤ Buffalo meat brochette (~1 kg): 10,000-15,000 FCFA (£13-20) ➤ Antelope: 25,000 - 40,000 FCFA (£33 - 52), depending on the cut and size
<p>* This only reflects prices in the research locations during the summer and does not reflect regional differences in prices in other parts of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, nor does it account for potential fluctuations.</p> <p>** Hunting expenses generally include fuel, ammunition, traps, and other hunting supplies.</p>		

¹⁵³ Gore, Meredith L., Robert Mwinyihali, Luc Mayet, Gavinet Duclair Baku--Bumb, Christian Plowman, and Michelle Wieland. 2021. "Typologies of Urban Wildlife Traffickers and Sellers." *Global Ecology and Conservation* 27.

¹⁵⁴ Focus group with hunters in Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire, August 2023

¹⁵⁵ Focus group with wildmeat buyers in Doropo, Côte d'Ivoire, August 2023

¹⁵⁶ KII interviews from the field data collection

2.2 Brokers and Intermediaries

Generally, wildmeat sellers (also called intermediaries) are individual brokers who procure meat from hunters and then either cure it through smoking, drying or cooking or sell it directly to restaurateurs and consumers with specific demands or to another intermediary who may export it to another location.¹⁵⁷ An intermediary may be a wholesaler, market trader, a restaurant or chop bar owner, or their staff. These intermediaries typically purchase wildmeat directly from hunters in the bush, near protected areas or in rural villages after hunters return from their trips. In Ghana, these wholesalers and market traders handle the largest share of the wildmeat market.¹⁵⁸

Globally, women are typically the primary sellers of wildmeat at local or lightly commercial levels, while cross-border and syndicate-based international trade in wildlife is conducted almost exclusively by men, with the exception of a few high-powered, wealthy women.¹⁵⁹ This role of local seller/intermediary is one of the two most common and acceptable roles women play in the wildmeat value chain, and is a role that is both acceptable for men and women to hold, although it is much less common for men.¹⁶⁰ This role is relatively accessible, as it is generally unskilled, although having a direct connection to hunters improves sellers' opportunities for income generation.

Given that the wildmeat trade is difficult to regulate, intermediaries may operate in close proximity to IWT activity, although most respondents claimed that they did not purchase from known criminals. However, this emphasises the importance of perception: though hunting in Côte d'Ivoire has been illegal since 1974, and the data indicates that Ivorian women remain quite involved in the trafficking and resale of illegally obtained wildmeat, they do not necessarily view themselves as criminals. Indeed, Ghana is the only context where intermediaries have legal avenues by which they may obtain permits to buy and sell wildmeat, although actual possession of such permits is fairly uncommon.¹⁶¹ Most Ghanaian intermediaries reported that they do not know how or where to obtain or renew permits, which keeps them operating outside of the formal, regulated system.¹⁶² Like with hunting permits, government authorities and experts acknowledged that systems and processes for issuing and enforcing sales permits in Ghana are not decentralised, and are therefore inaccessible to the majority of people who need them. Instead, brokers in Ghana resort to engaging in illegal sales of wildmeat, just like in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, operating mostly informal services and risky, under-the-table deals - despite a formal legal pathway by which they might participate in the value chain.

¹⁵⁷ Hema, Emmanuel M., Vally Ouattara, Gnoumou Parfait, Massimiliano Di Vittorio, Djidama Sirama, Daniele Dendi, Wendengoudi Guenda, Fabio Petrozzi, and Luca Luiselli. 2019. "Bushmeat Consumption in the West African Sahel of Burkina Faso, and the Decline of Some Consumed Species." *Oryx* 53 (1): 145-50.

¹⁵⁸ Mendelson, S., Cowlshaw, G. and Rowcliffe, J.M. 2003. Anatomy of a Bushmeat Commodity Chain in Takoradi, Ghana. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 31(1): 73- 100, doi: 10.1080/030661503100016934

¹⁵⁹ Seager 2021

¹⁶⁰ *Across the entire research sample, intermediaries/brokers were predominantly women.*

¹⁶¹ Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

¹⁶² *ibid.*

Because it is mainly informal and illicit, the wildmeat value chain is largely made up of trust-based relationships. Respondents noted that both hunters and intermediaries do not sell to anyone that they do not already know for fear of retribution or being tricked into some sort of extortionary relationship. In terms of connecting hunters to brokers, their meeting place depends on the remoteness and insecurity of the region. For example, if a female intermediary must meet the hunter in the forest to obtain his kill, respondents in Burkina Faso noted that she might bring her husband or other male companion for protection, given that organised crime or insecurity may be more prevalent in these areas where fewer security forces are present. In Ghana, female brokers noted that while crime such as carjacking, robbery or kidnapping does occur in rural areas, engaging in the wildmeat value chain poses a similar risk to any other type of livelihood.

After obtaining wildmeat from hunters, the data revealed that rural female sellers in the savannah around Mole, Damongo, Bole and the Tamale areas in Ghana predominantly transport meat to bigger cities where they can sell it for more money, whereas women in the Upper East and Upper West regions largely sell their meat directly to consumers within their localities. The data showed similarly fluctuating dynamics in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, where women based in more remote, inaccessible areas typically sell their meat locally, while those who are located near urban areas have more opportunities to capitalise on these linkages. In general, many rural women do not have the resources necessary, such as money for fuel or a mode of transport, to bring meat to urban areas, unless they live close by.¹⁶³

Instead, urban-based women who have the financial means and strong value chain networks sometimes travel to nearby rural hunting villages to buy wildmeat in bulk from hunters directly or from other intermediaries, then transporting it back to urban areas. In Ghana, the data showed that this type of direct, urban-to-rural connection is starting to occur more frequently in the Upper East region (the Fumbisi area). Although this helps facilitate trade within the value chain, rural female intermediaries shared their concerns that this trend could push them out of business. If urban brokers with more capital were able to establish direct relationships with hunters, they could possibly squeeze rural women out of the trade entirely. However, ultimately, and due to the lack of clarity around legality of the trade, these relationships are predicated on deep trust between hunters and intermediaries, which favours personal 'small town' relationships that are often brokered through family ties.¹⁶⁴

Dynastic Links to Wildmeat

In the three research contexts, the data uncovered a trend of female intermediaries who have accumulated significant influence and power in their communities. Such women are typically part of a family hunting dynasty, referred to as "kinship activity."¹⁶⁵ These kinship activities are quite common, especially in rural areas, and more than half of wildmeat enterprises are inherited.¹⁶⁶ As

¹⁶³ Expert interview with NGO conservationist, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2023

¹⁶⁴ Expert interviews with women who participated in the ELVa workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

¹⁶⁵ Seager 2021.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

noted in Part One, families often work as a unit to bring in revenue from wildmeat, participating in various roles within the value chain. For example, a father and son may hunt, while a wife and her daughters cure and sell the meat to a restaurant. Alternatively, the daughter of a hunter, being familiar with the hunting value chain and the different cuts of meat and their quality, price and curing needs, may become a successful brokers of meat obtained from hunters her family knows, selling meat to local consumers or to urban restaurateurs (thereby, carrying on her family's wildmeat legacy).

Given this dynamic, a woman involved in some part of the wildmeat business is more likely to have a family member who is also involved in that value chain, especially in rural areas.¹⁶⁷ Women related to hunters will receive preferential treatment in terms of accessing prime pieces of meat. Those who are not members of hunting families must strengthen their relationships with hunters so that they are able to access good quality meat. Female brokers interviewed for this research noted that they bolster their relationships with hunters through a variety of ways, but mainly by providing in-kind loans—whether it's purchasing ammunition, traps, fuel or hunting permits.

Certain brokers have successfully leveraged their wildmeat family ties, in combination with savvy business practices, to accumulate and consolidate power and wealth within the value chain. One example from the research is a hunter's youngest daughter in Burkina Faso who has cornered the market on supplying ammunition to the hunters in her region. Through the ammunition monopoly she created, she can influence the type, quantity and quality of meat she receives from multiple hunters.

Box 5: Women as ammunition buyers and suppliers

The control, supply and provision of ammunition is typically associated with hunters, security providers and non-state armed groups—all sectors that are male-dominated across the areas of study. Therefore, from a gender norms perspective, it is particularly interesting to note that female brokers supplying ammunition to hunters was commonly reported across the research sample in both Ghana and Burkina Faso.

In Ghana, respondents indicated that women intermediaries often provide ammunition directly to the hunters for three reasons: first, the respondents reported that in Ghana, formal ammunition suppliers are keener to sell to women, who are believed to be less inclined to resell to illicit actors or use it to engage in crime and illicit activities. This reflects the common gendered belief that men are more likely to engage in criminal activity than women. Second, because law enforcement may go undercover to try and buy ammunition and provide it to hunters engaged in illicit activities, hunters are increasingly less trusting in male suppliers and, therefore, more likely to seek to reduce the risk of entrapment by relying on female ammunition suppliers. Third, Burkinabe and Ghanaian women were known to have market networks across multiple communities that provide them with more and better information than hunters about where to find the lowest ammunition prices.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

Additionally, many hunters hunt at a subsistence level, which means that they often do not have the required capital to purchase ammunition up front before they go hunting. Certain women intermediaries may have better capacity to take out a loan and broker arrangements regarding these resource supplies.

Although the evidence presented thus far demonstrates close relationships between male hunters and female intermediaries, choosing to provide in-kind supply loans does not come without its risks. There are typically no formal legal agreements between hunters and sellers. Sellers in Burkina Faso averred that the flouting of verbal agreements by hunters is an ongoing challenge, and some of them suggested that regulating the wildmeat industry, through organising associations, for example, could mitigate the issue. In all three contexts, respondents noted that they knew of instances where hunters did not reimburse in-kind supply loans, and that in such instances, there is little action the seller can take. Going to law enforcement could open up a seller's business activities to scrutiny and create potential opportunities for extortion, not to mention potentially damage a broker's reputation for being untrustworthy (as reporting to law enforcement may be seen as being an informant). These examples further underscore the importance of trust in the wildmeat value chain, even when engaging in known illegal activities.

Meat Preservation

Apart from the in-kind loan relationship, an additional area of the wildmeat value chain that has opportunities for improvement is the curing and storage of wildmeat. Meat preservation occurs after meat is obtained from hunters and before sale to consumers or to restaurateurs. As noted above, wildmeat is typically butchered where it is killed, both to facilitate ease of transportation but also to conceal the type of animal that was killed, especially if it is a protected species. Female sellers acquire the wildmeat directly from hunters and then immediately cure it, before transporting it, so it is less likely to spoil before sale.

However, in all three research contexts, to avoid detection from security forces, instead of meeting an intermediary in or around the forest or savannah, hunters may deliver their kill directly - in the middle of the night. Most intermediaries cannot easily preserve the meat at this time, resulting in significant spoilage and waste.¹⁶⁸ According to one female intermediary from Tumu, Ghana, by morning, up to 80% of the meat will have gone bad due to heat exposure, with wild dogs often consuming the leftovers that the intermediaries could not salvage.¹⁶⁹ Especially in rural areas where incomes are lower and electricity and appliances are costly, these female brokers typically do not have access to any type of cold chain, whether it is refrigeration or freezers.¹⁷⁰ Instead, they are faced with a market inefficiency, limiting the quantity of meat they can purchase and potentially leading to meat spoilage and loss of income. This becomes more economically inefficient, because in an effort to prevent further spoilage and profit loss, female sellers reported

¹⁶⁸ Expert interview with wildmeat sellers in Tamale, Ghana, February 2023

¹⁶⁹ Focus group with wildmeat intermediaries and sellers from Tumu, Ghana, June 2023

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

that they lose their bargaining power in these cases because they are forced to sell off older or spoiling meat at cheap prices to avoid a total loss of income.¹⁷¹

Without a cold chain, selling raw meat is particularly risky because of associated unpredictable delays. First, hunters may take time to finish up their hunt and return from the forest/savannah to meet the sellers. Then, the intermediaries may need to travel to urban areas or markets to sell their meat, adding additional time in typically warm climates, resulting in a high risk of spoilage. These delays in getting the meat to market without access to a cold chain means that most female brokers smoke or dry it as an alternative. However, this is not a perfect solution, as brokers note that after several days without refrigeration, even cured meat will start to spoil.¹⁷² Moreover, having adequate storage space for even dried or cured meat is also a serious constraint, limiting how much meat they can purchase and cure.¹⁷³ These limitations constrain the economic growth potential for female brokers. And yet, these limitations also point to the opportunity to provide alternative livelihood options to brokers who are looking to expand their economic activities and increase incomes.

2.3 Restaurateurs and Food Processors

Women also play an important role within the next level of the wildmeat value chain: the restaurateur and food processor. Like for brokers and intermediaries, in all three locations of research, the role of food processor and seller (whether at a chop bar or restaurant) is primarily held by women. The definition of food processor is a spectrum: women may prepare the wildmeat at home and then hawk it on the street or in a small kiosk; they might sell it smoked, dried or raw to restaurant owners (the action of which also falls into the intermediary category); and restaurant owners might integrate the meat into other dishes on their menus. In Ghana, chop bar restaurants and the women who are involved in them make up the largest share of wildmeat market actors and account for 85% of retail market sales.¹⁷⁴ In Côte d'Ivoire, those who own restaurants and chop bars are 63% female.¹⁷⁵

The research found that female restaurateurs and chop bar owners, especially those who own restaurants in urban areas, are generally well respected and perceived to be successful—providing an interesting contrast to some of the literature that argues that women often do not profit much from the IWT.¹⁷⁶ Restaurateurs and food processors in the research locations tend to profit the most in the value chain, while facing the least amount of risk, while hunters are often at risk of violent attack by armed group or animal, or being interdicted by security providers and intermediaries face high risks of spoilage, medium risks of being extorted by hunters or other

¹⁷¹ Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Mendelson, S., Cowlshaw, G. and Rowcliffe, J.M. 2003.

¹⁷⁵ Gaubert, Phillipe, Chabi A. Djagoun, Missoup A.D., Nazif Ales, C.V. Amougou, A. Din Dipita, J. Djagoun, et al. 2023. "Vendors' perceptions on the bushmeat trade dynamics across West Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons learned on sanitary measures and awareness campaigns." *Environmental Science and Policy* 152:1036-49. 10.1016/j.envsci.2023.103649.

¹⁷⁶ Seager 2021

actors, and some risks of being apprehended for trafficking wildmeat. Even in Côte d'Ivoire where wildmeat sales are illegal, most restaurateurs and food processors are able to hide behind businesses that also process and sell licit foods, therefore rarely facing legal obstacles.¹⁷⁷

In Burkina Faso, women operating restaurants may be older, over 40, and have ostensibly worked their way up from being an intermediary to a restaurateur.¹⁷⁸ From a gender norms perspective, given that all female respondents noted that they must obtain permission from their husbands to participate in IGAs outside the home, it is logical that women who own and operate restaurants are approaching middle age. By that time in their life, they likely already have an established marriage and children who no longer need close care, and their husbands likely feel less threatened when they are working in a public-facing job that serves both men and women. Additionally, as noted, to be a restaurateur is a position that younger women may aspire to—and need more capital to launch.¹⁷⁹ Older women may have had the opportunity to save money and/or have built relationships to borrow capital or create a strong supply network, including from within their families.

In general, the job of restaurateur may be more highly regarded than that of intermediary because: 1) restaurateurs engage directly with consumers—including wealthier patrons who will pay the premium for more exotic wildmeat, 2) they can sell a range of meats and other foods, meaning that their food supply is diversified so they are less exposed to the risks of serving only illegally procured wildmeat, 3) they are typically not held accountable for any of the illegal activities carried out by hunters or intermediaries, and 4) they are perceived to have the highest value-added on their products, though this particular perk is more applicable in urban areas where wildmeat is a luxury.¹⁸⁰

Urban female restaurateurs may also play a more specialised role than rural female restaurateurs: whereas rural women don multiple hats when it comes to the wildmeat value chain, procuring meat, cooking and reselling it locally in small kiosks, urban female restaurateurs often have a stricter division of labour, employing cooks and working directly with rural intermediaries who supply them. As noted, certain urban restaurateurs may also have bespoke relationships with hunters, bypassing the intermediary to supply hunters directly with ammunition, traps and/or hunting permits in exchange for the first choice of a hunter's kill when he returns. Wealthy restaurateurs might also provide fuel and/or transportation for hunters so that they can bring the meat as quickly as possible to the restaurant, further decreasing the possibility for loss and upping potential profits.

One case in Burkina Faso is particularly noteworthy, where a female restaurateur is connected directly to hunters, finances their trips and thereby cuts out the role of any intermediaries. To

¹⁷⁷ Expert interview with Ivorian Forestry agent, Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire, August 2023

¹⁷⁸ *Women that were bringing in significant profits clearly did so because they had built up a thriving business in Burkina Faso. In Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, they were typically in their 30s or 40s.*

¹⁷⁹ Expert interview with Ghanaian gender expert, Tamale, Ghana

¹⁸⁰ *Interestingly, in the past, chop bar owners in Ghana made comparatively smaller profits than hunters—a phenomenon which appears to have become inverted now that wildmeat is viewed as a luxury good.* Mendelson, S., Cowlshaw, G. and Rowcliffe, J.M. 2003.

increase her supply of wildmeat and reduce spoilage risks, she was able to save enough money to purchase a freezer from Lomé, Togo. During her interview, this woman also indicated that she is considering diversifying her menu to include fish, which she believes may be a more stable and legal alternative to wildmeat, despite being less profitable, especially as regulations continue to shift and her business grows.

Direct relationships between urban restaurateurs and rural hunters are less common in Côte d'Ivoire, according to the data. Instead, intermediaries are connected to hunters in areas near the parks, and they then sell that meat to restaurateurs in urban areas. There are a few restaurateurs that operate in rural areas, but they are less common, with people more likely to eat at home and hunters often supplying meat just for their families and small communities.

Butchers

Interestingly, unlike for large, farmed animals, the research did not find that butchers have distinct roles in the processing of wildmeat—even for larger species. Instead of bringing the animal to a butcher shop, a hunter will often butcher a large animal on site for ease of transportation, selling or exchanging pieces of it to intermediaries who then cure or directly sell it. As noted, another reason a large animal may also be butchered on site is because it may have been illegally hunted, either from a protected species or protected area. When the animal is butchered in the bush, it is more difficult for law enforcement to assess what kind of animal it was or where it was hunted (to determine its legal status), thus helping to avoid interdiction. Smaller animals, such as the agouti, are typically sold whole to the intermediary or restaurant.¹⁸¹ Sources also noted that interested wildmeat buyers could pay an extra fee to either the hunter or intermediary to butcher the animal if they did not feel comfortable doing so themselves.

Power-brokering Roles of Women Restaurateurs

As the research found that some female restaurateurs make significantly more profits than anyone else in the value chain due to the luxury status of wildmeat in cities, respondents acknowledged their power-brokering roles within the value chain and sometimes their communities. Women typically reinvest most of their profits back into their businesses, with any remaining funds contributing to the care of children and household dietary needs.¹⁸² One woman interviewed was using her profits to strengthen her capacity in other income-generating skills, in this case, to pay for her midwifery training.¹⁸³ Some women also save part of their profits in informal savings schemes like rural banks and village savings and loans associations (VSLA). In general, the literature shows that women are more likely than men to spend their profits on children's social wellbeing, such as paying for school and healthcare.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ *Agouti in Ghana are not illegal to hunt, and, in the south, it is often farmed for consumption.* Expert interview with conservationist, Tamale, Ghana

¹⁸² Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

¹⁸³ Expert interview with a female broker, Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024

¹⁸⁴ Seager 2021.

Finally, an additional element of women's role in this trade is their ability to communicate and influence wildmeat market demand preferences to hunters, depending on what is most desired both within local rural and urban markets.¹⁸⁵ This again underscores the important influential role women can play: if female intermediaries and restaurateurs were educated about threats to biodiversity and human health posed by certain wildmeat practices, working together, they could potentially influence hunting preferences.

2.4 Consumers

Wildmeat is universally consumed across all demographics, and as an ethnic-Nouni female wildmeat intermediary from Leo, Burkina Faso explained ““Bushmeat is eaten by everyone except those who are forbidden to eat it.” This alludes to the fact that the way in which wildmeat is consumed or used can be influenced by cultural, age or gender-specific factors.¹⁸⁶

Consumption Drivers

Wildmeat consumption depends on food preferences, nutritional needs, sociocultural and religious traditions, wildlife availability and hunting enforcement. While it is not necessarily a regular part of everyday diets, 30% of West Africans consume wildmeat,¹⁸⁷ although men generally consume it more frequently.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, younger people in West Africa are reportedly less inclined to consume wildmeat these days, possibly because urbanisation means that they are less likely to have it integrated into their palates, and other proteins - like chicken, beef and fish - are increasingly available and affordable.¹⁸⁹ Religion is another factor, with Muslim halal practices observed in parts of the research area, which impact the type of wildmeat consumed and how it is prepared.¹⁹⁰

Meanwhile, poor consumers in rural areas (both men and women) eat wildmeat out of necessity or because it is the most easily accessible food source, and also generally a key ingredient in traditional cuisine. However, in locations that are in close proximity to major trade centres and border crossings, wildmeat is more commonly found as a menu item in restaurants that also sell farmed meats and other products. In urban areas, wildmeat consumers are typically wealthy, as it is often more expensive than poultry, beef or fish products.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Focus group in Bouna, Côte d'Ivoire, August 2023

¹⁸⁶ Seager 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Chausson, Alexandre M., J. Marcus Rowcliffe, Lucia Escouffaire, Michelle Wieland, and Juliet H. Wright. 2019. “Understanding the Sociocultural Drivers of Urban Bushmeat Consumption for Behavior Change Interventions in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo.” *HUMAN Ecology* 47 (2): 179-191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-019-0061-z>.

¹⁸⁹ Luiselli et al. 2020, p. 733.

¹⁹⁰ Igugu, Olivier, and Laurence Boutinot. 2023. “La consommation de la viande de brousse à l'épreuve de changements environnementaux.” *Anthropology of food* 17 (May).

¹⁹¹ Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

Box 6: Wildmeat and Food Security

The wildmeat trade is a critical component of food security for many communities in West Africa, particularly for those located in austere areas with limited infrastructure and markets. Wildmeat consumption is also experiencing a renaissance in parts of conflict-affected regions, such as in Burkina Faso, where violence has impeded farming and trade for several years, and humanitarian assistance is limited.¹⁹²

The benefits of consuming wildmeat is that it provides a diverse array of nutritious foods, contributing important proteins, fats and micronutrients to people that might otherwise have limited food availability.¹⁹³ The literature suggests that food security is relatively higher in impoverished communities in West Africa that rely more on wildmeat consumption as a food source, likely because they have fewer resources to raise or purchase farmed meats, although these communities' exposure to novel pathogens is also correspondingly higher.¹⁹⁴ However, without the sustainable management of ecosystem services, unregulated hunting for wildmeat may also have the unintended consequence of threatening food security, as depleted wildlife stocks leave hunters no choice but to seek out wildmeat farther and farther from their homes, with an eventual consequence being potential food crisis-driven displacement.¹⁹⁵

An example from Ghana underscores the luxury status of wildmeat in urban areas: a trendy restaurant in Accra puts forward an electronic ordering system where customers select fufu as a base (59.40 cedis, about £4), with a choice of a variety of farmed or wildmeat. Whereas the farmed meats are included in the base price, adding wildmeat more than doubles the cost of the meal (adding 158.40 cedis, approximately £10.50). This clearly highlights how wildmeat is regarded as a delicacy and is highly valued in urban areas. In addition to high prices related to scarcity, an unstable market, limited cold chain infrastructure and the need to transport the product from rural to urban areas, it is also important to remember that the price is likely further driven up by the cache associated with purchasing an illicit product that is bespoke and rare. Only those in the know and with enough money can access this exclusive delicacy. These factors have contributed to a booming discreet network of relationships between sellers and consumers, where a restaurant only might offer wildmeat on a secret menu.¹⁹⁶

Additionally, the research highlights how most people who consume wildmeat view it as a healthy nutritional option, compared to fattier and industrially farmed animals. Although wildmeat is often leaner, it is unclear if it is actually healthier. However, this preference also showcases an embrace of traditional local culture and products over farmed or imported foods, again demonstrating the

¹⁹² Expert interview with Burkinabe forestry agent, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

¹⁹³ Gonedelé Bi, S., Inza Koné, J.C.K Béné, E.A Bitty, K.A. Yao, B.A. Kouassi, and P. Gaubert. n.d. "Bushmeat Hunting around a Remnant Coastal Rainforest in Côte d'Ivoire." *Oryx* 51 (3): 418-27.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Hema et al. 2019.

entrenched and perhaps glamorised nature of traditional cultural values, an important point when considering potential campaigns to counter the demand for wildmeat at the consumer level.

Where to Find Wildmeat: Our Areas of Study

Burkinabe respondents signalled that major wildmeat markets are located in regional and national capitals, like Ouagadougou and Koudougou. Additionally, people pointed to Ghana for the widespread availability of wildmeat in chop bars and restaurants in both urban and rural settings, which makes sense given its more lenient hunting and trade regulations. In Ghana, respondents reported that wildmeat is bought and sold in a variety of places, from major markets in Kumasi, Accra and Tamale to smaller communities around Buiepe, Brekum and Tumu. However, in Côte d'Ivoire, because of the illicit nature of hunting and trade in wildmeat, respondents confirmed that there are no markets where wildmeat is openly available for purchase. Instead, wildmeat is consumed discreetly in communities and cities near hunting grounds, like Doropo and Bouna, as well as, in distant urban centres where consumers are able to pay a significant premium.

Applying a gender lens, in rural areas, female consumers may purchase (or exchange) meat directly from hunters and prepare and consume it within their household. As noted, women may also receive meat directly from their hunter family members, then consume the wildmeat as a primary protein or during the lean season when crops are scarce. Based on our research, it is less likely that rural women would purchase meat from an intermediary, instead connecting directly with hunters to get a better price. Because they are both physically closer in proximity to hunters and may also be related to them or know someone who is, it is easier for rural women to source wildmeat directly. Rural men who consume wildmeat are typically directly involved in hunting or their wives have direct connections to a wildmeat source.

Women in urban areas might have fewer options than rural women when it comes to a direct wildmeat source, as they do not necessarily have contact with hunters. Male consumers may face fewer constraints when it comes to travelling far distances to locations where wildmeat is sold, at least from a cultural norms' perspective. However, as men are traditionally not involved in planning and preparing household meals, they typically would not make the journey to rural areas to procure the meat directly. Instead, if they wish to consume wildmeat, they will buy it directly from a restaurant.

VEOs as Wildmeat Consumers

Chop bar and restaurant owners in all three contexts admitted to selling to men they assumed were involved in armed groups or criminal activity, however in Ghana the level of knowledge is low about VEOs, though hunters reported that they have interacted with and sold meat directly to JNIM agents in the bush. The research found that, in addition to typical consumers, known individuals involved in SOC, banditry, trafficking and VEOs frequent chop bars and restaurants, purchasing wildmeat for consumption. In Ghana specifically, knowledge of VEO actors is limited, although in Damongo, Tamale and Hain (near the border with Burkina Faso) chop bar owners reported awareness of selling food to members of armed groups, criminals and bandits. In Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, VEOs and other armed groups are highly active in the protected areas

where the wildmeat value chain is also most active. As JNIM is known to buy directly from hunters in parks elsewhere in West Africa, we may assume that these exchanges also take place in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso - although hunters are unlikely to admit to any such positive interaction.¹⁹⁷ Finally, in Burkina Faso, chop bars were reportedly frequented by violent extremists, and several bar owners admitted to knowingly selling to men they assumed were involved in armed groups and violent extremism, with justification being that they did not feel threatened or at risk of being attacked.

Declining Demand for Wildmeat

As noted above, due to a variety of factors including increased hunting regulations, decreasing biodiversity, increased fear of zoonotic disease transmission and changing food preferences, consumption of wildmeat in West Africa may be in decline. Improved infrastructure and poverty reduction are contributors to changing food preferences. For example, as refrigeration techniques have become more widespread, alongside national efforts by Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire¹⁹⁸ to electrify and connect rural areas to urban centres, access to imported and commercially produced frozen chicken, beef and fish has increased. This, in combination with improved access to farmed livestock, makes farmed meats more affordable and consistently available, the confluence of which is slowly reducing demand for wildmeat.¹⁹⁹ This demonstrates that demand for wildmeat is relatively elastic, with farmed meat as an acceptable substitute for many people. On the other hand, the reduced supply of wildmeat has also increased prices in urban areas where demand for the luxury item persists, although its luxury status means that few people can afford to consume it. Yet, in isolated rural areas bordering forested zones and protected areas, low-price farmed meat and other consumables are still not easily accessible because of limited market access and infrastructure, resulting in ongoing wildmeat consumption out of necessity.²⁰⁰ Therefore, wildmeat is becoming mainly a food consumed by the richest and the poorest, with others increasingly consuming farmed meats.

2.5 Defenders and Conservationists

As illustrated above, women and men both play multiple roles that may be categorised as wildmeat 'offenders,' contributing both to the supply of wildmeat for consumption as well as generating demand for it. Additionally, both genders play roles as wildmeat 'defenders,' engaging in multiple activities that help fight the corrosive impacts of unsustainable hunting and IWT - although, as noted, women are more likely to play 'offender' roles in this context. Defender roles include forest rangers, other law enforcement, public servants and NGOs.²⁰¹

Forest Rangers

¹⁹⁷ Expert interview with a Burkinabé hunting brotherhood, Tanguiéta, Benin, December 2023

¹⁹⁸ *Burkina Faso is one of the least electrified countries in the world, with only 19% of the population having access to electricity, while in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana it is 71% and 86%, respectively.* "Access to Electricity." 2017. The World Bank. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=BF-CI-GH&most_recent_value_desc=false.

¹⁹⁹ Multiple KIs in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, June-August 2023

²⁰⁰ Expert interview with brokers from Damongo, near Mole National Park, February 13, 2024

²⁰¹ Agu and Gore 2020

Forest rangers play an important role in the wildmeat trade, enforcing regulations in protected areas and reducing poaching, a role that is typically filled by men. None of the respondents across the three country contexts said that they were aware of female conservation actors operating in their communities, reflecting the global trend of rangers being predominantly male.²⁰² Forest rangers are typically public servants working for national park services, although their salaries may be paid either directly by the government or through an NGO, foundation, or the private sector²⁰³. While female forest rangers exist in certain contexts, like the Black Mambas in South Africa, an all-women ranger unit focused on counter-poaching in Kruger National Park,²⁰⁴ In our areas of study, gender norms seem to prevent women from assuming these predominantly male-dominated positions. This is partly because, as a patrolling park ranger, women would be taken far away from their domestic responsibilities. Additionally, as insecurity increases in the region, the likelihood that rangers encounter VEOs, or even armed poachers also increases. As a result, community members may view the ranger role as too dangerous for women.²⁰⁵

This highlights the gap in female representation within the ranger population. However, given that women play a prominent role as offenders in the wildmeat value chain, this gap may elevate protection risks for female offenders.²⁰⁶ For example, when rangers detain either men or women for trafficking or violating hunting rules, the rangers must engage in a thorough search of the suspect's person. If the suspect is a woman, such a thorough search is not culturally appropriate throughout most of West Africa and can lead to shame on behalf of the woman.²⁰⁷ On the other hand, as female suspects may not be searched due to these cultural norms, all-male ranger units face a potential blindspot that can be exploited by wildlife traffickers.²⁰⁸ Indeed, women are often used as smugglers in other aspects of the IWT because of their reduced search risk.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, detained women may not have access to feminine hygiene products or gender-segregated detention facilities, elevating GBV risks.²¹⁰

In areas where female rangers operate, evidence suggests that they have influential roles within their communities, creating positive multiplier effects whereby it becomes both increasingly acceptable for other women to follow the same career trajectory and the anti-poaching agenda becomes more broadly embraced.²¹¹ In the case of the Black Mambas, for example, studies show

²⁰² A 2019 WWF report surveyed more than 6,000 rangers from 28 countries and found that only 7.5% of them were women. Belecky, Mike, Rohit Singh, and William Moreto. 2019. "Life on the Frontline - A global survey of the working conditions of rangers." World Wildlife Fund. https://c402277.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/publications/1279/files/original/wwf_rangers_survey_report_2019.pdf?1575295516.

²⁰³ Expert interview with Sergio Lopez founder of Wildlife Angels, December 2023

²⁰⁴ Expert interview with Black Mamba ranger, Sergeant Naledi Malungane, 28 February 2024

²⁰⁵ Expert interview with the Director for Community Management, Forestry Division, Mole National Park, Ghana, 12 February 2024

²⁰⁶ Expert interview with Nigerian gender and conservation expert Emilia Okon, 14 December 2023

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Seager 2021

²⁰⁹ Iori, Greta. 2019. Women, Wildlife Crime and Conservation. YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgPzDjuhrQc>

²¹⁰ Expert interview with Nigerian gender and conservation expert Emilia Okon, 14 December 2023

²¹¹ Seager 2021

that their presence and success has led to a decrease in local support for poaching activities.²¹² The Black Mambas are unarmed, and incidents of armed poaching have decreased in the part of the park where they patrol.²¹³ Including women in formal conservation roles has also helped enable women's empowerment, such as by helping female community members focus on finding alternative IGAs outside of IWT.²¹⁴ The all-female Akashinga unit of Zimbabwe were inspired by the Black Mambas, and, in addition to their patrol activities, also promote nutrition programs in their communities, which has received strong support from village leaders and other community members.²¹⁵

Enforcement of anti-poaching initiatives has become increasingly militarised, which, overall, has certain broad-sweeping negative repercussions. For example, this militarisation contributes to the exclusion of women from ranger forces while simultaneously contributing to the hypermasculinization of the role, which also puts men in increased danger.²¹⁶ Furthermore, when conservation activities become militarised in fragile and conflict-prone contexts, it can further contribute to violence.²¹⁷ Finally, when local community members engaged in illegal hunting are targeted by militarised forest rangers, this has the potential to cause long-term rifts between the community and the rangers, further complicating enforcement and contributing to potential instability.²¹⁸ This is particularly relevant in our countries of interest, as VEO activity continues to accelerate in protected areas where they might recruit among aggrieved communities that are targeted by militarised conservationists.²¹⁹

Other Public Servants: Government, Law Enforcement and NGO Employees

Government, law enforcement²²⁰ and NGOs can also be wildlife defenders. However, these actors often lack capacity, resources and personnel to capably stop all wildlife offences. Statutorily, both experts in government and NGO capacities affirm that, due to the limited forestry personnel, other security agencies, especially the police, are often required to serve as backup in enforcement of conservation rules, including those related to the wildmeat value chain.

²¹² Danoff-Burg, James A., and Alejandrina R. Ocañas. 2022. "Individual and community-level impacts of the unarmed all-women Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit." *Zoo Biology*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35652415/>.

²¹³ Expert interview with Black Mamba ranger, Sergeant Naledi Malungane, 28 February 2024

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Graham, Jessica, Joni Seager, and J.G. Global Advisory. n.d. "Unbreakable: Females Fighting Poaching." Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC). Accessed January 21, 2024. <https://traccc.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Unbreakable-Females-Fighting-Poaching.pdf>.

²¹⁶ Seager 2021, p. 41.

²¹⁷ Duffy et al. 2019.

²¹⁸ Anagnostou, Michelle, Geoffrey Mwedde, Dilys Roe, Robert J. Smith, Henry Travers, and Julia Baker. 2020. "Ranger perceptions of the role of local communities in providing actionable information on wildlife crime." *Conservation Science and Practice* 2 (6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.202>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ *The police, albeit defenders of wildlife, often create obstacles for hunters and women when they are transporting meat to bigger towns for sale and consumption. Using patrols and checkpoints, police may take the opportunity to extort these actors.*

Additionally, although still predominantly male, within the defender space, educated women who do participate in conservation are most likely to end up as government or NGO employees. Data from more urban areas, such as Tamale, Ghana, showed that it is possible to find female conservation actors in office jobs, which is more culturally appropriate than working out in the field as a ranger. However, it is important to note that there is a significant gap between the educated, wealthier, urban women who work towards conservation at higher levels and the village women engaged in the wildmeat value chain as intermediaries, who see these activities as basic livelihoods. As such, with adequate levels of engagement and by providing options for viable alternative livelihoods, female wildmeat defenders have the potential to influence female offenders.²²¹

²²¹ Expert Interview with Janet Onguka, Rights and Conflict Sensitivity Coordinator-Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR), Wildlife Conservation Society, 11 January 2024

Part Three: The Illicit Wildlife Trade and Armed Groups

According to INTERPOL, IWT often finances and enables SOC, and is linked to armed violence, systemic corruption, and arms and drug trafficking.²²² This section therefore reviews the nexus between the wildmeat actors involved in IWT and other organised crime, including violent extremist groups, which are increasingly prevalent in the research locations. The goal in assessing VEO activity linked to IWT is to better understand how hunters and women involved in the wildmeat value chain interact with JNIM, specifically, with the goal of better understanding other entry points for radicalization, particularly among women.

3.1 Corruption and the Illicit Wildlife Trade

Due to the informality of the wildmeat trade, those involved rely heavily on informal labour, unaccountable transactions and sometimes illicit procurement of resources, to include trafficked wildlife and weapons, traps and ammunition for hunters.²²³ Corruption within the wildmeat value chain is widespread, which, according to the literature, is also an indicator that organised crime is present, likely facilitating the transnational component of the value chain, and paying off security officials in the process.²²⁴ The research locations were chosen specifically to better understand how the traditional trade in wildmeat functions within a well-structured and thriving transborder illicit supply chain in this subregion that is known to finance SOC and VEO activities.²²⁵

Table 2: Financial crimes in the wildlife value chain²²⁶

Role	Crimes commonly charged against this role
Poacher	Robbery, theft
Broker	Smuggling, fraud
Intermediary/Seller	Fraud, smuggling, tax crimes, bribery and other forms of corruption
Restaurant/Chop bar owner	Fraud, tax crimes

Many wildlife crimes are considered low-risk and high-profit.²²⁷ As such, the IWT attracts actors from across the criminal spectrum, from those involved in high-level trafficking networks to regular civilians and subsistence hunters. Furthermore, in order to function without disruption, IWT often involves corrupt government officials, typically including the ‘defenders and

²²² “Illegal wildlife trade has become one of the ‘world’s largest criminal activities.’” 2023. Interpol. <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2023/Illegal-wildlife-trade-has-become-one-of-the-world-s-largest-criminal-activities>.

²²³ Expert interview with security officer, Gwollu, Ghana, 12 February 2024

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 867.

²²⁵ Van Uhm, Daan P., and William D. Moreto. “Corruption within the Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Symbiotic and Antithetical Enterprise.” *The British Journal of Criminology* 58, no. 04 (July 13, 2017): 864–85.

²²⁶ Adapted from Egmont Centre of FIU Excellence and Leadership, 2021.

²²⁷ Zain, Sabri. 2020. “Corrupting trade: An overview of corruption issues in illicit wildlife trade.” World Wildlife Fund. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/tnrc-introductory-overview-corrupting-trade-an-overview-of-corruption-issues-in-illicit-wildlife-trade>.

conservationists' of wildlife (see 2.5).²²⁸ This criminal space involves many players partly because, in the contexts where it occurs – including the research locations of this study, the lines between licit and illicit activities are often blurred due to lack of enforcement of regulations, porosity of borders and the prevalence of trade activities that operate in the informal economy due to little adherence to modern legal frameworks. Wildmeat trade, like IWT, often occurs in the periphery, far from central law enforcement, where rule of law is often weak and less well known by those involved, leaving room for corruption and criminality.²²⁹

Additionally, as women (and men) knowingly engage in illegal activities related to hunting and selling wildmeat, they open themselves up to potential opportunities for extortion or other types of blackmail. This was reported by all respondents in Côte d'Ivoire and several respondents in Burkina Faso, who spoke about arbitrary arrests they experienced. The laws and brokered arrangements with corrupt officials are not transparent, and the women indicated that people often use threats of exposing this corruption to manipulate the women involved in the trade.²³⁰ While corruption among security forces appears to be systemic in Côte d'Ivoire, and endemic in Burkina Faso and Ghana, the respondents described these fees and interdictions as added hardships. This reinforces the fact that corruption among security forces can damage broader peace and security,²³¹ because it can sometimes fuel more tensions, and it certainly erodes security force legitimacy, two issues that armed groups typically exploit when recruiting among populations based on the grievances they hold against the state.²³²

Border security are particularly prone to corruption due to their incapacity to sufficiently monitor and police every person crossing vast porous borders, particularly hunters and women intermediaries who might not use formal border crossings.²³³ The lack of prioritisation of resources and training for forestry agents, border security and other remotely located security providers means that these posts often get ignored by capitals, leaving them at risk of participating in corrupt practices.

The research found that the local population, especially men, are generally aware of what is illicit activity and what is not, but due to loose enforcement of laws, hunters were reportedly comfortable with engaging in technically illegal or corrupt activities, as long as they understood

²²⁸ *ibid.*

²²⁹ Van Uhm and Moreto 2017

²³⁰ Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

²³¹ "The Common Denominator: How Corruption in the Security Sector Fuels Insecurity in West Africa." 2021. Transparency International Defence & Security. <https://ti-defence.org/publications/west-africa-security-defence-sector-corruption-insecurity-conflict/>.

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ *Almost all respondents in Ghana reported widespread and systemic corruption among security guards - particularly police, customs and border security - who are known to extort people crossing through unapproved routes and sometimes detain their goods without providing sufficient information to the person about why they are being interdicted. In Burkina Faso, similarly, respondents reported that the VDP also indiscriminately stopped people crossing the borders and extorted fines from them. In Côte d'Ivoire, the forestry and water agents have established a sophisticated corrupt network to allow people to hunt while paying off security to look the other way, as explained in Part One.*

what the process was.²³⁴ Typically, the literature highlights that while women participate in corruption, they are less engaged in it than men because they have less to offer in exchange for a bribe as they are less likely to be in positions of power.²³⁵ However, in the research contexts, women were keenly aware of the illegality of their actions and the need to operate more discreetly to avoid interdiction by government officials. As such, several women in Burkina Faso reported how their communities view them as criminals, given their role as intermediary between hunters and consumers. In Côte d'Ivoire, women operate with complete discretion to avoid alerting other members of the community, let alone the research team, to their actions. Finally, in Ghana, women involved in wildmeat trade typically believe that they are contributing to IWT, despite the legality of hunting and selling wildmeat in the country, due to interactions with corrupt government officials who they believe were extorting them.²³⁶

3.2 Traffickers

IWT often occurs within a broader context of illicit and criminal activities. IWT networks in West Africa can be loosely linked to international trafficking syndicates, as East African and Southeast Asian buyers largely purchase wildlife and wildlife products from West African hunters and traffickers either directly or through brokers.²³⁷ Because of the consistency of the product and the limited interference by law enforcement, West African traffickers are critical nodes within the broader international IWT value chain.²³⁸ As such, poaching in West Africa will likely continue to expand as the lack of resources and the presence of VEOs in these spaces make parks difficult to regulate.²³⁹ However, fully understanding and mitigating the West African IWT remains difficult because foreign buyers involved in the wildlife trade operate discreetly.²⁴⁰

It is important to note that IWT linked to the poaching of protected species is distinct from trafficking in unprotected wildlife. For example, agouti is an important protein source in rural communities and are not illegal to hunt. However, if the hunter has violated a hunting ban or illegally crossed a border, then the product can qualify as being trafficked and the marketing and sale of the wildmeat in a chop bar is technically contributing to the illegal trade.²⁴¹ This is an area of confusion for women who might not be involved in an illegal hunt but could inadvertently be implicated in broader IWT issues because of their involvement in buying and reselling the meat, especially across borders.²⁴² Furthermore, conservation policies rarely distinguish between poaching and the subsistence-focused trade, which puts the majority of risk on poor local actors who can be interdicted by wildlife defenders.²⁴³ Additionally,

²³⁴ Howson, Cynthia. "Women Smuggling and the Men Who Help Them: Gender, Corruption and Illicit Networks in Senegal." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 50, no. 3 (2012): 421–45.

²³⁵ Seager 2021.

²³⁶ Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

²³⁷ Costa, Jacopo. 2021. "Working Paper 35: Social Network Analysis Applied to Illegal Wildlife Trade between East Africa and Southeast Asia." *Basel Institute on Governance Working Papers*, 1-58.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Expert interview with Vanda Felbab-Brown, Director of Illicit Economies and Organized Crime at the Brookings Institute, 4 March 2024

²⁴⁰ INTERPOL 2023

²⁴¹ Expert Interview with Ofir Dori, Founder of the NGO Eagle Enforcement, December 2023

²⁴² Expert interview with Nigerian gender and conservation expert Emilia Okon, 14 December 2023

²⁴³ Expert Interviews with World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Crime Programme, 14 December 2023

due to the ambiguity around legal and illegal hunting, hunters often participate in both simultaneously to garner bigger profits, which makes it more challenging for law enforcement to distinguish.²⁴⁴

Still, certain hunters deliberately participate in IWT, and in all three research contexts, respondents noted their awareness of such hunters who are operating discreetly because they are selling rare and endangered species for a bespoke clientele, in addition to regular wildmeat. As a respondent in Doropo, Côte d'Ivoire explained, they "Are all forced to traffic, given the illegal nature of hunting here."²⁴⁵ Those who were involved in known IWT poaching activities described using acid to destroy elephant carcasses so that vultures would not be attracted to the kill site, an indicator that rangers look for when tracking hunters.²⁴⁶ Some Ivorian hunters also reported that they have clientele who pay for these illicit hunts, highlighting the existence of the regional IWT network.

3.3 Women and Wildlife Crimes

Like the women themselves, women's involvement in IWT is diverse, ranging from coercion, happenstance due to family or traditional livelihoods and deliberate and willing participation. The research was particularly clear that many women have a certain level of agency, even seniority, in establishing criminal involvement, both for women and men in their communities. In addition to being active offenders in the wildmeat value chain, women were found to perpetuate gender norms by influencing the men in their households to engage in illegal hunting and poaching. For example, even when men seek alternative livelihoods, women may press them to participate in poaching, using stereotypical gender norms about masculinity as their justification.²⁴⁷

This becomes problematic, as women are the co-architects of masculinity in many cases. If they are also encouraging men in their households to participate in known criminal activities, then they are, by proxy, also influencers behind SOC, and possibly VEO, involvement. For example, the research found that as hunting spaces became constrained and more dangerous for hunters, women reported that they still pressure their male household members to participate in the lucrative activity to sustain the household. This dynamic stems partly from the women's lack of IGAs, education and entrenched gender norms, which prohibits them from both participating in profitable livelihoods or criminal efforts themselves.²⁴⁸

Despite the influential role of women in IWT in the research contexts, studies in environmental justice and green criminology suggest links between hegemonic masculinity, wildlife crimes and their impacts on women.²⁴⁹ In Burkina Faso, female intermediaries may have less social capital than male intermediaries if they are arrested for engaging in illegal activities. In Ghana, female

²⁴⁴ Half of the respondents in all three contexts reported that hunters knowingly participate in poaching.

²⁴⁵ This number is an aggregate of the entire research sample in all three countries, but is inflated by the universal understanding by hunters interviewed in Côte d'Ivoire who acknowledge the illegality of their activities.

²⁴⁶ Expert interview with Ivorian Forestry Agent, January 2024

²⁴⁷ Expert Interviews with World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Crime Programme, 14 December 2023

²⁴⁸ Seager 2021.

²⁴⁹ Sollund, Ragnhild. 2020. "Wildlife Crime: A Crime of Hegemonic Masculinity?" *Social Sciences* 9, no. 6: 93. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9060093>

intermediaries are often the only actors trusted to procure ammunition, putting pressure on them to stay in their line of work, even if they end up supplying hunters engaged in illegal activities. Finally, in Côte d'Ivoire, women were reportedly afraid of repercussions from hunting and were distrustful of strangers, and only worked with trusted wildmeat value chain actors.

Box 7: Despite its legality, Ghanaians operate in black market wildmeat sales

During the February 13, 2024 workshop with women intermediaries and chop bar owners in Tamale, Ghana, participants noted that the majority of women involved in the wildmeat trade believe it is an illegal activity. In Ghana, where wildmeat hunting and sales are legal, women brokers were concerned that if they spoke about the trade with government officials, local leaders or even among other brokers, that they could expose themselves to legal ramifications and risks. This general belief that the trade is illegal is linked to systemic issues of lack of education, awareness of legal and civil rights and a gendered position whereby women feel they cannot question the authority of men in their communities.

Some women at the workshops were aware of the registration process to legally sell meat; however, these women reported that the process was incredibly complicated and mired by bureaucratic inefficiencies that would have required them to take a day off work to travel to a municipal office and register within the system. Other women who had been told about the restaurant certification requirements necessary to sell food in Ghana assumed it was an extortion scheme by local officials. As a result, they chose to continue to operate in the illegal space of wildmeat procurement and sales instead of paying what they believed to be arbitrary fees to a corrupt local official.²⁵⁰

Overall, women reported in Ghana that they believe they are engaged in illegal business actions, which affects their capacity to organise into labour or civil society organisations, due to the concern that organising could bring attention to their activities and open them up to scrutiny by authorities.

Women's involvement in IWT is often the path of least resistance, but in some cases, they are forced into the trade and exploited.²⁵¹ In West Africa, involvement in illicit economic activities places both men and women in the path of SOC and VEOs. However, female respondents across all research areas noted that working in the wildmeat value chain does not necessarily have more serious protection risks than any other IGA. However, some risks are specific to the trade. For example, in Burkina Faso, one woman reported that she buys her wildmeat across the border in Ghana, where it is sold more freely, and transports it to Burkina Faso, unknowingly contributing to wildmeat trafficking. Another female broker near Tamale, Ghana noted that her complicated system of in-kind loans resulted in her coming up short in a payment, resulting in violence.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Expert interviews with women who participated in the Elva workshop on Women in Wildmeat in Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

²⁵¹ Iori, Greta. 2019. Women, Wildlife Crime and Conservation. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgPzDjuhrQc>

²⁵² Key informant interview with a female broker in Tamale, Ghana.

One prime example of the barriers women face when it comes to wildlife crimes is that they are less likely to be knowledgeable about the laws they are breaking, whereas men are often better informed, contributing to a more holistic, risk-informed decision around hunting.²⁵³ Additionally, law enforcement officers are trained to know if the meat the sellers and intermediaries are dealing with is legally or illegally procured, from a protected area or from a protected species; women, on the other hand, because they are also one step removed from the hunt, typically do not receive any training.

Gender-Based Violence in IWT

The gender-based violence (GBV) risks for women in IWT are many, but with regards to wildmeat trade, this type of violence is most obvious in the presence of large numbers of labour migrants who work in male-dominated large-scale infrastructure projects and extractive mining enterprises, which are common in the research contexts.²⁵⁴ In the research locations, artisanal (unregulated) gold mining is growing, and, in the absence of being able to eat at home or in restaurants, miners are known to consume wildmeat. Although there were no reports of GBV in the research, these unregulated spaces present potential risks, such as being subjected to sexual exploitation, for unaccompanied women operating chop bars or providing other wildmeat-related services.²⁵⁵

Female respondents reported the potential for verbal and physical abuse, harassment and even rape when dealing with male hunters, suppliers or even law enforcement. While these are risks women face across all IGAs, or even at home, the protection risk for women engaged in the wildmeat value chain comes from the fact that the law is no longer on their side if they try to seek some sort of recourse. Further, since the value chain is based on trust, women are less likely to report issues to law enforcement out of concern that no one will work with them again.

3.4 Violent Extremism and Serious Organized Crime

Since 2020, violent extremism from the Sahel has rapidly expanded into Coastal West Africa. In the three research locations, VEOs are not only present in the parks, but are beginning to engage with community members in trade centres along the border. Moreover, while JNIM is known to operate in the areas of research in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, there were indications that in communities around the bigger parks in Ghana, JNIM was active, purchasing resources from shops as far south as Jirapa, Ghana.²⁵⁶ This section explores the overlap between VEOs and the IWT elements of the wildmeat trade.

²⁵³ Expert interview with Nigerian gender and conservation expert Emilia Okon, 14 December 2023

²⁵⁴ Seager 2021.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Expert interview with security officer, Gwollu, Ghana, 12 February 2024

Box 8: Evolution of Violent Extremism in West Africa

For more than a decade, West Africa has experienced violence from non-state armed groups and VEOs with ties to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The al-Qaeda aligned group, JNIM, formed in March 2017, when four Mali-based VEOs — Ansar al-Din, al-Mourabitun, Katibat Macina, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) — merged, and the leader of JNIM, Iyad ag Ghali, pledged the group's allegiance to the emirs of al-Qaeda, AQIM, and to the leader of the Taliban.

There is evidence that JNIM and its affiliated groups have been intermittently active in Coastal West Africa since 2015, when JNIM's Katiba Macina began expanding into southern Mali, Burkina Faso and northern Côte d'Ivoire through its local cells known as Katiba Khaled ibn Waled and Katiba Alidouyou. However, it was not until 2016, when violent extremists linked to what has become JNIM attacked a resort in Grand Bassam, near Côte d'Ivoire's capital, killing 33 people, that it became evident that these VEOs were intentionally expanding outside the Sahel.²⁵⁷ For years, JNIM's operations rolled back into the Central Sahel, focused on taking and controlling territory around the tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

However, by 2019, JNIM was once again expanding into Coastal West Africa with more strategic deliberation. As multilateral counterterrorism missions supported by the United States, France and European Union targeted VEOs in the central Sahel, JNIM decentralised its katibas across western and eastern Burkina Faso in search of new areas in which to set up rest and resupply zones. Additionally, old JNIM cells were discovered far inside Ghana in 2018, indicating the establishment of sleeper cells and rear-bases for the group to fall back to during counterterrorism missions in the Sahel. These examples showcase the group's capacity to discreetly expand into new territories.²⁵⁸ Between 2020 and 2023, JNIM began exerting control over stretches of land and highways across southern Burkina Faso, embedding itself into trade centres that boast significant illicit trade networks in weapons, fuel and gold. Many of these trade centres are also strategically located in the border spaces between the Sahel and Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin, which allow the group to move freely into Coastal West Africa, exploit the informal trade networks there, and recruit locally.²⁵⁹

West Africa's Parks as VEO Safe Havens

JNIM is using the forested areas in the research context as staging grounds in which to take shelter during clashes with security forces in the Sahel while expanding their access to supplies

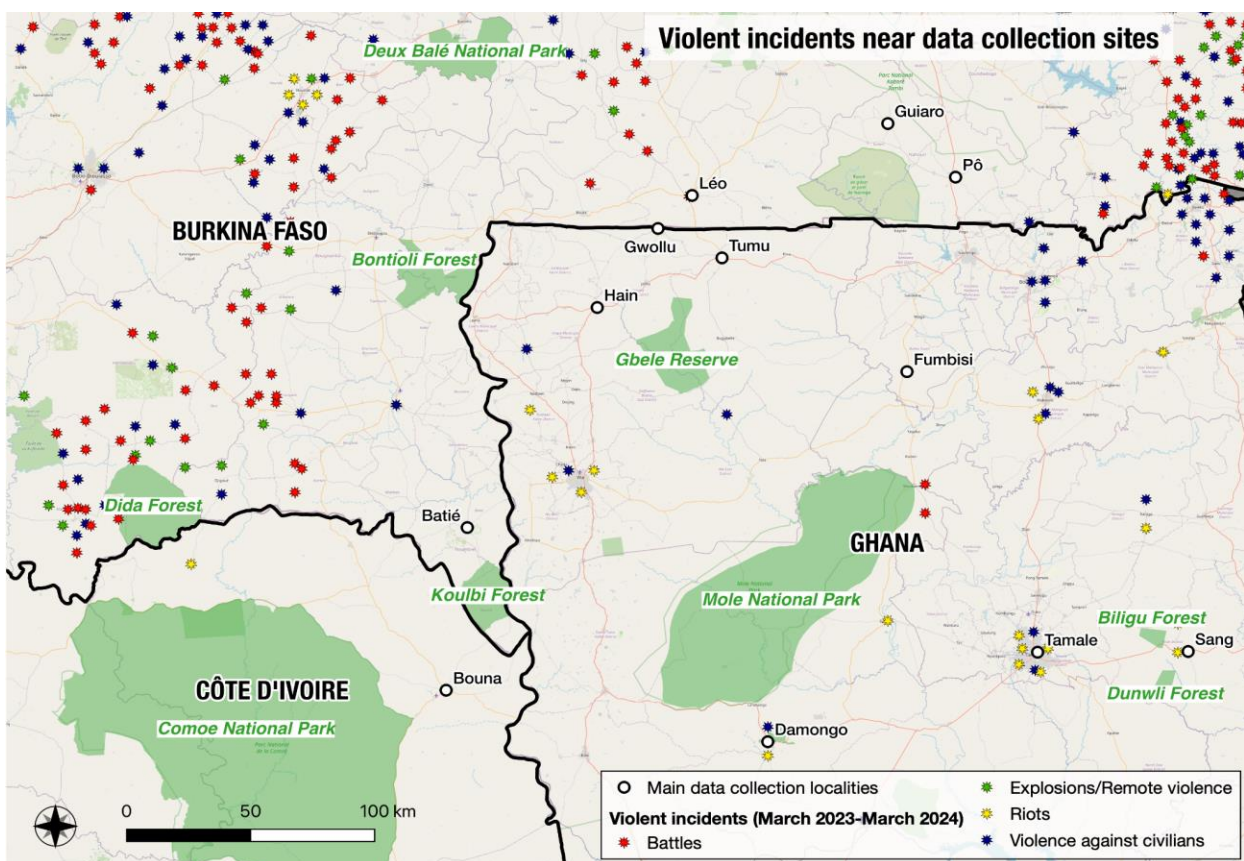
²⁵⁷ Bernard, Aneliese. 2021. "Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover from the Sahel to Littoral West Africa," Analytical Report. Elva.

²⁵⁸ Expert interviews with intelligence officers in Accra and Bolgatanga, Ghana, February 2024

²⁵⁹ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. 2022. "The jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and prospects for containing the expansion." Promediation.

<https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/16928652/The+jihadist+threat+in+northern+Ghana+and+Togo.pdf/f0c4ca27-6abd-904e-fe61-4073e805038a>.

and new recruits. This has allowed JNIM to take advantage of both the illicit and licit supply chains that run through these areas and draws the group into the same market economies as the wildmeat value chain. This is due to these towns' proximity to protected spaces that serve as refuges for armed groups, such as the Dida Forest in Burkina Faso, north of Comoé National Park in Côte d'Ivoire.²⁶⁰ Although there is little evidence that JNIM is active in Ghana's Mole National Park, security officials and forestry agents there acknowledge the risks of spillover due to the porosity of borders and the vastness of the park complex.²⁶¹ Moreover, some experts believe that the heavily dense park spaces in the north of Mole are currently being used as rear-bases by JNIM; since there are rarely any human or security presence outside the main entry base in the south of the park, and there is no complex surveillance or monitoring system, it is believed that these other smaller and less dense forests in Ghana's Upper West region are used as access routes from Burkina Faso to the park where VEOs can operate more discreetly.²⁶²



The parks and protected reserves present challenges for law enforcement.²⁶³ These typically less governed spaces are vast and rich with resources that nearby communities rely on for livelihoods and sustenance, like wildmeat. As wildlife protections have been imposed, however, traditional hunting has decreased. Damongo, Ghana, a town at the southern entrance of Mole National Park,

²⁶⁰ “The role of national parks in illicit economies and conflict dynamics.” 2023. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/national-parks-illicit-economies-conflict/>.

²⁶¹ Expert interviews with the CT Fusion Centre in Accra, Ghana on 6 February 2024, and the Forestry Commission, of Mole National Park on 12 February 2024

²⁶² PCVE and conservation NGO expert, northern Ghana, January 2024

²⁶³ Expert Interview with the deputy director of the Forestry commission, of Mole National Park on 12 February 2024

was dependent on the wildmeat trade but is now struggling with soaring underemployment, particularly among young men who would have traditionally been hunters, and, as such, were not trained to do other work.

Additionally, while the presence of VEOs in this park remains unclear, the vastness of the park complex and its proximity to Burkina Faso make the space impossible to monitor, and, therefore, an ideal refuge in which armed actors - bandits, VEOs and traffickers - can hide.²⁶⁴ Several respondents reported that hunters who have continued to hunt despite the growing risks of VEOs in the protected areas across all three research contexts are now increasingly scrutinised as being potentially linked to violent extremists. As such, some people assume that, if hunters safely return from the bush with a large supply of meat, it signals their collaboration with armed groups who the locals believe now control the parks.

Furthermore, the lack of oversight of these ungoverned spaces makes it easy for JNIM and their agents (logistics supporters) to engage with wildmeat value chain actors like hunters to restock their supply of ammunition, weapons and other resources. Hunters in all three contexts reported having experienced exchanges with VEOs. In Burkina Faso, the links to JNIM are more obvious, as with their ability to capably control territory, the violent extremists are more transparent about who they are. As a result, there are multiple reports of hunters and trackers joining VEOs, likely due to having engaged with these actors in the forests, leading to recruitment.²⁶⁵ In Ghana, hunters admitted to having purchased ammunition and weapon parts from Burkinabé armed men, who did not identify themselves, but who the hunters presumed were JNIM combatants.²⁶⁶ Most of these transactions occurred during a hunt, in the middle of the forest and likely out of necessity, when resources run low or equipment breaks. In addition to hunting supplies, several respondents reported that they paid VEOs for protection against bandits during hunts.

Box 9: Artisanal Gold Mines in Parks

Artisanal gold mines often emerge inside or on the periphery of park spaces in West Africa. Comoé National Park in Côte d'Ivoire has recently experienced a gold rush, where Ivorian authorities identified over 60 new artisanal gold mines inside Comoé in 2021 alone.²⁶⁷ Similarly, towns near Bole, Ghana (particularly Dollar Power), which sit between Mole and Bui National Park, have also exhibited gold booms in recent years.²⁶⁸

JNIM has begun to corner the artisanal gold trade across the region to finance their operations in the Sahel, presenting problematic indications for the Coastal West African countries as these groups expand.²⁶⁹ The gold rush is a significant spill-over risk for criminality and violent

²⁶⁴ Expert interview with security and intelligence consultant, Accra, Ghana, 20 February 2024

²⁶⁵ Expert interview with senior security officer, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

²⁶⁶ Focus Group with hunters in Dagomba, Ghana, August 2023

²⁶⁷ Bernard 2022

²⁶⁸ Expert interview with retired intelligence officer, Accra, Ghana, 20 February 2024

²⁶⁹ Bussink, Coen, Françoise Pautel, Rupert Cook, and Marcena Hunter. n.d. "Gold Trafficking in the Sahel." Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessments (TOCTA) - UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta_sahel/TOCTA_Sahel_Gold_v5.pdf.

extremism as it attracts predominantly young, strong, armed and typically underemployed men. Artisanal gold mining is fairly unregulated, enabling an illicit trade that feeds into SOC with a global footprint.²⁷⁰ Additionally, because gold mining requires explosives to set up gold mines (or smaller capacity wells), the arms and explosive trade in West Africa has become intrinsically linked to gold mining.²⁷¹

In addition to creating more common space for armed groups and hunters to converge within and potentially merge interests, gold panning is problematic for the wildmeat trade as it inadvertently results in the displacement of wildlife and, subsequently, hunters. The loud noises from the use of explosives scare wildlife away, and the mines themselves contribute to forest and ground loss, making these forested spaces increasingly less hospitable for fauna and flora.²⁷² As a result, women and men involved in the wildmeat trade in Comoé National Park indicated that their livelihoods are increasingly vulnerable since the onset of gold panning, as they are forced to travel farther to hunt wildlife.

Additionally, illicit markets are booming around these gold mines, setting the stage for VEOs and SOC to flourish. Informal settlements and markets typically emerge around these mines, which attracts miners from around the region. With these gold miners - and the unregulated and informal labour they provide - often comes increased criminality and violence.²⁷³ Because the trade is so lucrative, gold trafficking attracts local underemployed hunters as well as female wildmeat stall owners and cooks who sell to the men in the mines.²⁷⁴ The research found that the presence of these gold mines increases demand for hunted wildmeat and chop shops, creating more unregulated livelihood opportunities for hunters and women involved in the trade.

Fear of Contagion of Violence, Disrupts Hunting

Growing VEO presence in the research context has disrupted regular hunting and the wildmeat trade due to real or perceived notions of heightened insecurity in the bush and protected areas. Burkinabé respondents reported that incidents linked to violent extremism have shuttered much of the wildmeat trade due to government closures of parks, and thus shrinking access to hunting space. Some also explained that confusion is manifesting about who is who, as VEOs are disguising themselves as pastoralists and hunters in order to move more freely without being interdicted by security forces.²⁷⁵ Hunters near Batié, Burkina Faso reported that they now travel longer distances to avoid interacting with VEOs and to avoid scaring their communities with the sound of gunshots. Ghanaian respondents also reported that the number of security checkpoints at the entrances of parks and on borders has proliferated.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁰ *West Africa's gold is typically bought by buyers from the Middle East, South Asia and Europe, who refine it in their refineries, and sell it to global markets.* Bussink et al. 2023.

²⁷¹ Bussink et al. 2023.

²⁷² Expert interview with Ivorian Forestry Agent, January 2024

²⁷³ Bussink et al. 2023

²⁷⁴ Expert interview with retired intelligence officer, Accra, Ghana, 20 February 2024

²⁷⁵ Expert interview with senior security officer, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

²⁷⁶ Focus groups in Damongo and Tamale, Ghana, June 2023

Hunters are also regulating their hours in the parks, as they are afraid of encountering VEOs. As one broker from Fumbisi, Ghana, explained, “The hunters complain about these criminals and terrorists. It is one of the reasons why they no longer go very far and also why they are not getting enough meat.”²⁷⁷ About 20% of the research sample across the three contexts indicated that hunters are now competing for space in the parks with armed groups, and another 20% said that hunters have experienced violent interactions with VEOs in the bush. A small number of respondents reported that hunters they knew have left to join VEOs in the Sahel or are operating as agents and spies for JNIM. As a result, the Burkinabe government is actively recruiting hunters into the VDP, both because they are already armed, and to stop them from joining VEOs.²⁷⁸

Black Market Dynamics of the Wildmeat Trade

In general, the wildmeat trade is a traditional IGA in which many people in West Africa participate. However, because of a variety of factors, including weak border security, newly deployed provisions for crossing borders (such as checkpoints, identification requirements and restriction on moving goods for trade across borders), the onset of violence and corresponding criminalization of carrying unregulated arms, and trafficking in goods, much of the trade remains informal. As such, in some places like Damongo and Jirapa, Ghana, women reported that they believe they have sold wildmeat to VEOs. While some women acknowledged that selling to these actors would cast doubt on their character in society, most women just viewed these sales as business. Across the three countries, officials and people involved in the trade referred to the trade in wildmeat as the ‘black market’, highlighting its illicit nature and under-the-table dynamics. As one female seller of hunting supplies from Tamale explained: “My family and community believe that I am involved in criminal activity, but in the bushmeat trade I am viewed as important because I am able to get hunting traps and ammunition and sell to hunters.”²⁷⁹

Additionally, restrictions on elements of the trade have had little effect in curtailing its criminal or violent elements. For example, bans on hunting and carrying firearms imposed by the Burkinabé government in 2013 appear to have not fulfilled their intention of containing VEO activity. Instead, these regulations have unintentionally further criminalised the wildmeat value chain by forcing those involved to operate more discreetly and procure weapons illegally. Additionally, Burkinabé respondents noted that since many hunters have joined the VDP to counter VEOs, wildmeat is increasingly in short supply due to a shortage of hunters, which will help grow the black market in wildlife trade.²⁸⁰ Finally, in Côte d'Ivoire, due to the discrete actions of those involved in the value chain, there was little information about the impact of violent extremism and insecurity on hunting and trading in wildmeat. This is driven by the fact that the parks are now a central focus of the government’s counterterrorism operations, contributing to hunting activities growing even more discreet.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Key informant interview with an ethnic-Builsa female broker in Fumbisi, Ghana.

²⁷⁸ Expert interview with senior security officer, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 2024

²⁷⁹ Key informant interview with an ethnic-Dagomgba female, retailer of hunting supplies from Saguli (Tamale), Ghana.

²⁸⁰ Focus group in Kouéré, Burkina Faso, August 2023

²⁸¹ Expert interview with Ivorian Forestry agent, January 2024

Conclusion

Wildmeat is a staple for many West Africans who consume it as an important protein source, prefer its taste to that of farmed meat or indulge in it as a luxury. As such, for many West Africans the wildmeat trade has traditionally been a key income-generating activity, particularly for those who live far from urban centres or lack education and training to participate in more profitable and skilled livelihood activities. Despite the importance of this protein source and IGA for many communities in West Africa, wildmeat and its consumption create risks to biodiversity, health and sustainable livelihoods through the following main issues:

First, since wildmeat is a critical component of the IWT, as VEOs expand into new parts of West Africa, these value chains, alongside IWT and the illicit supply chain, present financing and resource sources for armed groups. Thus, wildmeat value chain actors can become directly implicated in armed group economies, and, as such, counter-trafficking efforts that intend to curb armed group financing could directly impact hunters and the women involved in the wildmeat trade.

Second, the literature overwhelmingly points to unregulated hunting and poaching as a direct cause of the decline in certain wildlife populations in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.²⁸² As human populations continue to grow, the wildmeat trade, as is, is not sustainable due to practices such as over-hunting and corrosive environmental behaviours like deforestation, slash-and-burn farming and mining in protected areas. As the wildmeat trade is largely unregulated in the research contexts, actors within it do not typically adhere to conservation practices, leading to damaging impacts on biodiversity.

Third, the lack of enforced regulations on hunting, handling and serving wildmeat is a serious cause for concern with regards to global health. As biodiversity shrinks because of climate change, population growth, deforestation and unsustainable natural resource practices, different species are forced into closer contact with one another, leading to a growing potential for the emergence of novel pathogens. This risk is compounded by the criminalisation and informal nature of the wildmeat trade, as value chain actors will likely continue to avoid following official health and sanitation protocols or reporting bad practices, allowing the risk of zoonotic disease spread to increase.

However, the dynamics of the trade are shifting. Development in refrigeration and a growing import culture that brings in more frozen meats like chicken and beef have also tested the elasticity of wildmeat demand, working towards shifting food preferences. Further, global concerns about zoonotic diseases emanating from wildlife markets and wildmeat consumption have also impacted the wildmeat trade. For example, the Ebola crisis in West Africa temporarily decreased wildmeat demand in urban settings like Ouagadougou, which was a pattern repeated again during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸³

²⁸² Hema et al. 2019.

²⁸³ Luiselli et al. 2020.

All of these factors have gendered impacts for both men and women. Male hunters, who were once seen as strong providers and protectors of their communities may now be seen as lazy or criminals as their hunting space narrows, animal populations dwindle and armed groups encroach on wild spaces. Meanwhile, female intermediaries and restaurateurs are capitalising on the explosive demand for wildmeat in urban areas and yet are not always aware of the legal risks of the trade in which they partake.

These points demonstrate the push and pull factors for demand in wildmeat and how different factors shape the market. On one hand, certain women have obtained power and wealth thanks to their position as wildmeat restaurateurs or resource suppliers to hunters. Certain hunters have also profited significantly from the wildmeat value chain, especially when trafficking in high-demand protected species for bespoke buyers. On the other hand, as the demand for wildmeat may be shrinking in areas where farmed meat is becoming more ubiquitous, the livelihoods of those implicated in the value chain are threatened, especially in rural areas where few viable alternative livelihood options exist.²⁸⁴ However, as this trade shifts or shrinks, it could have seismic impacts on women's capacity to maintain livelihoods in changing markets.

In addition to food preferences and its contribution to livelihoods, hunting and selling meat is a deeply entrenched part of rural populations' cultural identities. Folklore around hunting remains strong, with evidence showing that simple hunting bans will not convince people to change practices they've embraced for centuries. Furthermore, these laws, especially complex laws that are not outright bans, are often not adequately communicated to local populations. Public officials are not always accountable for enforcing the laws in these contexts and occasionally apply corrupt practices, using bans or quotas to enrich themselves. Until there is better oversight of and accountability by rural government officials and law enforcement, bans and quotas will fail.

While it makes sense from a conservation, public health and security perspective in many places to simply outlaw hunting, policymakers must act strategically if they wish these laws to succeed. Any law or regulation limiting or banning hunting must be developed in consultation with rural communities to co-create solutions that allow these communities to continue to engage in their traditional practices in one way or another. Furthermore, a consultative process will also better inform populations, including vulnerable groups, about the details of these laws and regulations so they are clear on what they may and may not do, and the possible ramifications of breaking the law. Any new or existing legislation restricting hunting must have better government accountability and oversight in order to crack down on corruption. Lastly, eliminating one income-generating activity without replacing it with a culturally-acceptable, affordable, and easily learned alternative will drive the population to continue on with the original activity, even if it is no longer legal. Policymakers need to couple new legislation with population-centred programming to develop appropriate alternative licit livelihoods.

²⁸⁴ Van Uhm and Moreto 2017

Recommendations

Three major themes emerged in the research to guide thoughtful and methodical change, and so the following recommendations are tailored to these points:

1. The importance of engaging and sensitising people to emerging developments in policies regarding security and conservation: At present, most of the focus on tackling IWT is on enforcement, which consumes almost half of global anti-IWT funding.²⁸⁵ In 2016, only 6% of this funding globally went to demand reduction campaigns.²⁸⁶ Securitisation of national parks and forests on the borders between the Sahel and Coastal West Africa in the fight against VEOs reduces economic opportunities for these communities. However, there is a lack of coherence and application of conservation- and security-focused policies at local levels. The wildmeat trade is governed by customary practices, while statutory laws may be influenced by international best practices, which are often disconnected from local realities.

Recommendation 1.1: Amend and improve IWT regulatory frameworks and their communication. Many respondents noted that they had to travel far or pay high fees to obtain licences, which is prohibitive for many rural residents; obtaining these certifications simply needs to be more accessible. Additionally, there is a clear demand for advocacy to national authorities to reform and update anti-trafficking laws to focus on individual criminals who operate as the nodes between criminal clusters, rather than on subsistence-focused hunters and sellers at the bottom of the IWT structure. In rural contexts, customary authorities should be pulled into these processes as they know their communities best.

Recommendation 1.2: Clarify and sensitise value chain actors to anti-trafficking and conservation laws. Although some people are aware of laws about the trade, most have a misconstrued understanding of what activities are legal, which has discouraged them from advocating for their business interests with local leadership and security officials. There is a clear need to sensitise participants in the wildmeat trade, especially women, on the laws, their applicability and the individual rights possessed by each value chain member. This can be done through workshops, town halls, or social awareness campaigns. Involving women may be especially impactful, as they play an important role in influencing their male relatives' activities. Social media can be leveraged to conduct social awareness campaigns due to its penetration in both urban and rural communities, especially among youth.

Recommendation 1.3: Directly engage communities in addressing IWT. Communities need to be treated as partners in reducing IWT, and there are some examples from across the continent that can be scaled up. Ghana is using CREMAs to educate park-adjacent communities that are involved in the wildmeat trade about the implications of biodiversity loss, conservation and

²⁸⁵ Roe, D., and F. Booker. 2019. "Engaging local communities in tackling illegal wildlife trade: A synthesis of approaches and lessons for best practice." *Conservation Science and Practice* 1 (26). <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.26>

²⁸⁶ Seager 2021

resource management. When passionate and active CREMA members are engaged, these associations can be successful, and Ghana is trying to scale them to become regional touch points for the government and NGOs. In addition, there is a need to directly include and engage communities in activities focused on policing efforts, creating incentives for community-based conservation (e.g., through eco-tourism and local conservation or anti-poaching training programs like the Black Mambas, which also can contribute to women's empowerment). Leveraging the role of local and traditional leaders in a localised approach to IWT sensitisation can contribute to positive behaviour changes.

Recommendation 1.4: Consider formalising and regulating the wildmeat trade. Some women recommended formalising the wildmeat trade so that prices stabilise and opportunities for corruption and exploitation decrease. Regulation of the trade and its formalisation would raise government revenue through taxes and hunting fees and would protect biodiversity as it would put more pressure on hunters to follow hunting quotas and seasons and restrict hunting of endangered species. It would also allow wildmeat sales (wholesale and retail) to be regulated by health and food officials who could monitor for intermittent disease outbreaks and ensure compliance with food safety and health standards. The following explicit reforms can be taken:

- Update legal frameworks on hunting, conservation, and food management and sales. Most of these laws date back decades, long before biodiversity loss, insecurity and SOC were serious concerns.²⁸⁷
- Provide training on health and food safety protocols for sellers and restaurant owners.
- Form cooperatives to improve women's bargaining power and market connections.

2. Applying gender-transformative approaches that will not limit or negatively impact women's livelihoods or encourage more informal trade: Women's roles in wildmeat is a rare space where they may be empowered in an otherwise traditional environment, despite the informal nature of the trade. Their participation in the informal and even criminal elements of wildlife trade however, may be driven by the fact that they do not have the knowledge, skills or opportunity to seek out other work, as women typically lack these requisite skills in these contexts. This creates challenges for policymakers, as without nuanced consideration, any policy aiming to regulate or limit the wildmeat industry will likely have unintended negative consequences on the quest for gender equality.

Recommendation 2.1: Support alternative livelihoods for women. Work with women to identify and develop locally appropriate alternative livelihoods, but include other household and community members, including men. For example, in Nigeria, women are starting to engage in cocoa farming - a traditionally male-dominated industry that local women decided they wanted to try - instead of wildmeat reselling.²⁸⁸ To be truly sustainable and transformative, these livelihoods must be based on local market demand and participant interest.

²⁸⁷ Expert Interview with Ghanaian Forestry Commission, Tamale, Ghana, January 2024

²⁸⁸ Expert interview with Nigerian gender and conservation expert Emilia Okon, 14 December 2023

Recommendation 2.2: Promote financial inclusion for women. Provide easier access to low-interest or interest-free loans for women's business expansion and/or diversification. The women's workshop Elva hosted in Tamale highlighted the need for women to be able to purchase business inputs including refrigerators, freezers and generators to be able to store meats properly, avoid contamination from spoilage, and expand. However, to do this sustainably, women need better access to pro-poor and inclusive financial products, including through the regionally popular VSLAs, which also can support establishing collective bargaining methods, sharing resources and mutual financial support.

Recommendation 2.3: Improve business and food safety standards and reduce spoilage. In addition to cold storage, women expressed a need for food processing equipment or other value-added technologies that can reduce food spoilage and increase profits. Creating or strengthening existing collective associations or VSLAs would also provide an opportunity to rent or buy perishable food-preserving technologies for collective use.²⁸⁹ Further, public and private actors could train women in modern drying, smoking and salting techniques to improve compliance with industry standards on meat preservation.

Recommendation 2.4: Promote Sustained Donor Support of GTAs. Gender-related issues are often addressed in a piecemeal fashion, but it can take considerable time for cultural norms to shift, leading to incremental changes or incomplete transitions by the time one project ends and another begins. Further, it is essential to obtain community buy-in to achieve real ownership of change and sustained action that will lead to more equitable gender norms and roles. Donors and implementing partners need to coordinate and collaborate beyond funding cycles, ensuring that all efforts are strategically aligned and combined to empower communities to achieve real norm transformation over time.

3. There is a clear need to adopt creative approaches to regulating hunting and wildmeat sales: Criminalisation of wildlife hunting and trade without the provision of alternative IGAs leaves remote communities in proximity to forests with few options for sustenance and income generation. Despite the presence of various laws and regulations, enforcement is lacking, leaving the value chain largely unregulated. Therefore, the informal economy around hunting has served as a push factor towards bigger IWT networks. West African conservation laws are some of the weakest globally, resulting in global IWT actors increasingly eyeing the supply from this region. Therefore, regulations to curb informal hunting and wildlife trade need to be nuanced, taking into account the limitations they have on hunters and wildmeat sellers while also ensuring that enforcement agents are adequately resourced.

Recommendation 3.1: Tackle corruption in the enforcement of conservation regulations by equipping people with licences and explanations of their rights. Corrupt police, immigration and forestry officers have built successful extortion schemes within the wildlife trade. Much of their

²⁸⁹ Gender Workshop with women involved in wildmeat sales, Tamale, Ghana, 13 February 2024.

capacity to maintain these schemes is due to a lack of education about laws and rights related to wildmeat acquisition and sales among trade actors. However, anti-corruption efforts are difficult to implement and sustain. So, in addition to recommendation 1.2, donors can first equip people with access to their basic and citizen rights. This can be done by initiating and improving access to hunting licences and wildmeat sales permits to give members of the trade protections against corrupt officials that might spread misinformation about what is legal and illegal. These licences should have clear guidelines, requirements and consequences if they are not respected.

Recommendation 3.2: Recruit female conservationists, law enforcement and park rangers.

Hiring female rangers helps to transform gender roles and norms and reduces poaching.²⁹⁰ Involving women as rangers may also provide an important employment opportunity for women who might be otherwise culturally or socially marginalised. For example, the Akashinga in Zimbabwe initially sought out recruits who were survivors of serious sexual assault or domestic violence, or who were economically disadvantaged due to their social status as widows, single mothers or orphans.²⁹¹ In patriarchal societies where such women may face shame, marginalisation and even community ostracism, providing such an important employment opportunity flips the switch on empowerment.

Recommendation 3.3: Embed traditional beliefs and practices in conservation enforcement.

The taboos and traditional beliefs surrounding wildlife can serve as powerful tools for developing conservation policies. Traditional beliefs can also be used to generate buy-in on regulations around wildmeat (specifically hunting) by involving customary and religious leaders in advocating for conservation policies. Using familiar cultural practices in awareness campaigns can enhance understanding and community engagement. For example, where taboos against hunting or consuming certain species already exist, conservation policies can reinforce these prohibitions by formalising them. When taboos do not exist, conservationists may capitalise on traditional beliefs that emphasise sustainable natural resource management and environmentally friendly practices.

²⁹⁰ Graham, Seager, and J.G. Global Advisory, n.d.

²⁹¹ *ibid.*

Annexes

Annex 1: Legal Frameworks Per Country of Research

Country	Primary Legal Framework	Hunting Ban	Hunting Permit	Protected Species	Protected Areas	Sanctions
Côte d'Ivoire	Law n° 65-255 of 4 August 1965 on the protection of wildlife and the exercise of hunting	Yes, except for traditional hunting and wildlife farming, per Law No. 94-442 of 16 August 1994 amending the law n° 65-255	Yes, for small game hunting, sport hunting, commercial capture, scientific hunting and hunting of farmed wildlife (see Law n° 94-442)	Yes, according to the annexes of Law n° 65-255 and law 94-442 of 16 August 1994	Yes, by creating nature reserves and national parks (see Law n° 65-255)	Yes, per Law n° 65-255
Burkina Faso	Law n° 006/97/ADP of 31 January 1997 on the forest regime in Burkina Faso	Historically no, but, in 2013, they passed “Arrêté n° 2013 - 191 /MEDD/CAB/ portant ouverture et organisation de la saison d'exploitation de la faune” banning hunting	Yes, for sport hunting, commercial hunting, subsistence hunting and scientific hunting, per Law No. 006/97/ADP (1997) and Decree n° 2009/301 Governing the System for Arms and Munitions	Yes, according to the annexes of Law n° 006/97/ADP (1997) and Law No. 003-2011/AN of April 5th (2011)	Yes, creating classified forests, nature reserves, national parks and hunting zones, Law n° 024-2007/AN	Yes, per Decree n° 2017-0237/PES/PM/MEEV/CC/MINEFI/D/MCIA/MRAH/MTMUSR/MJDHPC of April 24th 2017
Ghana	Wildlife Conservation Regulation, 1971 (L.I. 685)	No, except for protected species and in prohibited areas, per the Firearms Act, 1972 (NRCD 9)	Yes, for sport, commercial, subsistence and scientific hunting, per the Firearms Act, 1972,) NRCD 9)	Yes, according to the annexes of L.I. 684 and the 1961 Wild Animal Preservation Act	Yes, creating reserves, parks and controlled hunting areas, Forest and Wildlife Policy (1994)	Yes, per L.I. 685

Annex 2: Wildlife and Wildmeat Represented from the Data

Scientific Name	French	English
Hippotragus Equinus	Rouan	Roan (antelope)
Alcelaphus Buselaphus	Bubale	Hartbeast (large antelope)
Kobus Vardonii	Cob de Fassa	Waterbuck (large antelope)
Syncerus Caffer Aequinoctialis	Buffle	Buffalo
Loxodonta	Éléphante	Elephant
Kobus Kob	Cob de Buffon	Western Cob (antelope)
Genus Redunca	Redunca	Reedbuck (antelope)
Tragelaphus Scriptus	Guib Harnaché	Bushbuck (antelope)
Cephalophus Rufilatus	Céphalophe à Flanc Roux	Red Flanked Duiker (small antelope)
Cephalophus Grimmi	Céphalophe de Grimm	Grim Duiker (small antelope)
Cephalophus Dorsalis	Céphalophe à Dos Jaune	Yellow-Backed Duiker (small antelope)
Papio	Babouin	Baboon
Erythrocebus Patas	Patas	Patas Monkey
Chlorocebus Sabaeus	Singe Vert	Green Monkey
Dendroperdix	Perdrix	Partridge
Thryonomys	Aulacode	Grass Cutter (cane rat)
Numida Meleagris	Pintade	Guinea Fowl
Panthera Leo	Lion	Lion
Phacochoerus Africanus	Phacochère	Warthog
Hyaenidae	Hyène	Hyena
Panthera Pardus	Léopard	Leopard
Manidae	Pangolin	Pangolin (scaly anteater)
Genus Lepus	Lièvre	Hare (jack rabbit)
Hippopotamidae	Hippopotame	Hippopotamus
Naja Savannula	Cobra	West African Banded Cobra
Ourebia Ourebi	Ourebi	Oribi (small antelope)
Paraxerus Palliatus	Écureuil	Red Bush Squirrel
Hystrix Cristata	Porc Épic	Porcupine
Lupulella Adusta	Chacal	Jackal

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